

tabletopgaming.co.uk April 2023

tabletop GAMING

BOARD GAMES | CARD GAMES | MINIATURES | RPGs

ULTIMATE GUIDE BOARD GAMES



Display until 28/04/23

EXPLORE THE DYSTOPIAN AGE WITH NEW STARTER SETS*



INCLUDES
ALL YOU
NEED TO
START PLAYING**



FREE UK SHIPPING ON ORDERS OVER £20***



Wayland Games

*MINIATURES ARE SUPPLIED UNPAINTED AND SOME ASSEMBLY WILL BE REQUIRED.

**UNIT CARDS ARE NOT INCLUDED AND CAN BE FOUND ON THE DYSTOPIAN WARS WEBSITE.

***TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLY, SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS. WHILE STOCKS LAST.



SCAN TO
**SHOP
NOW**

WWW.WAYLANDGAMES.CO.UK

FEELING THE PINCH?

Pay just £6.99 a month

No commitment | No catch



We've introduced a **brand new**, monthly offer that lets you enjoy all the perks of being a subscriber, without committing to a 12-month subscription.



To view our latest subscription offers go to:
www.ttgami.ng/ttg-subs2023



In this issue

08 AT A GLANCE

10 TEN OF THE BEST

Digital board games

12 CARDBOARD MANIFESTO

Is the online rulebook no good?

15 ROLE CALL

Our pick of upcoming RPG books

16 HAVE YOU PLAYED?

Dear hunter, are you ready for Bloodborne: The Board Game

18 ON THE CARDS **[NEW!]**

Checking out the latest and greatest card game news with Wossy

20 THE SOLOIST

Worldbuilding RPGs worth some time alone

23 FAVOURITE GAME

Emily from Gibsons Games picks a family favourite

24 HOMEWORLD FLEET COMMAND

We chat to Chris Birch about bringing the serene space shooter to the tabletop

29 AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 PLAYS

We take a trip to Trinidad & Tobago

30 CYANIDE & HAPPINESS

The bad-taste webcomic lands two games on our tabletops

32 THE GATEWAY **[NEW!]**

Get into the hobby with our guide to these gateway classics

34 PLAYED: FAMILY & PARTY GAMES

Our dedicated review section looking at family and party games

44 READ IT PLAYED **[NEW!]**

What's it really like to play these gaming classics, this month: Ca\$h & Guns

46 TRADITIONAL GAMES FOR LIFE

We explore what it's like diving into the world of traditional games, and playing them every day

52 OUT OF THE BOX **[NEW!]**

Our round-up of not-quite gaming accessories

54 ENCAPSULATE: 2014

We take a look at the hits of 2014

56 PLAYED: STRATEGY

Want your games full of strategy and crunch? Then start here

74 WHAT'S IN A GAME?

We take a look at educational games, and why they're so often so rubbish

76 PLAYED: ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Our verdicts on the latest roleplaying games, from indie titles right up to the biggest names

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE UP TO 10%. PLUS RECEIVE EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS See page 3 for more details

PLAYED

84 WHAT'S IN YOUR ATTIC [NEW!]

We check out the nostalgic gems once forgotten, and see if they're worth anything

87 ASK BEN

Our in house agony aunt deals with your ludological problems

88 PREVIEW: SCYTHE EXPEDITIONS

Welcome back to the world of Dieselpunk

90 CONNECT 4 [NEW!]

If you like this, you'll like that. This month: Carcassonne

94 WHO GOES FIRST? [NEW!]

Not sure how to start your next game? Borrow one of these instead!

96 SHOP SPOTLIGHT

98 TABLETOP TIME MACHINE

WANT TO KNOW WHAT TO PLAY NEXT? THEN READ ON...

FAMILY & PARTY GAMES

Playing games across the generations, with kids, or just with people who want to act like it? Here's where to start...



42

- 34 KING OF MONSTER ISLAND
- 36 READY, SET, BET
- 37 DISNEYS SHADOWED KINGDOM
- 37 SYNC OR SWIM
- 38 RANSOM NOTES
- 39 CASTRONAUTS
- 40 HELLBOY: THE DICE GAME
- 41 DULCE
- 42 QUICKITY PICKITY
- 43 SHOOT FOR THE STARS

STRATEGY

Looking for games that offer depth and challenge? Form a plan from here...

- 56 LACRIMOSA
- 57 WEATHER MACHINE
- 58 HEXPLORE IT: THE DOMAIN OF MIRZA NOCTIS
- 59 KLIK'S MADNESS: A HEXPLORE IT CAMPAIGN
- 60 NIGHTMARE PRODUCTIONS
- 61 BN1
- 62 STAR FIGHTERS: RAPID FIRE
- 63 SHAPERS OF GAIA
- 64 CLANK! CATACOMBS
- 65 ENCYCLOPEDIA
- 66 ALDABAS



71

- 66 GIFT OF TULIPS
- 67 HEROES OF NORMANDIE
- 68 FLIES, LIES & SUPPLIES
- 69 COME TOGETHER
- 70 CORRUPT PARLIAMENT
- 71 FINAL GIRL
- 72 ROBOTECH: RECONSTRUCTION

ROLEPLAYING

Time to be someone else? Beware, there may be dragons...

- 76 DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS
- 77 CY_BORG
- 79 DURANCE
- 79 BOX OF ADVENTURE: COAST OF DREAD
- 80 MIRU
- 81 DUNGEON DROP
- 82 TEARS OF A GODDESS
- 83 ULTRAVIOLET GRASSLANDS AND THE BLACK CITY



77



**Spirits of Nature, it is time to
save the forest once again!**

KODAMA - LIVING FOREST EXPANSION

EDITORIAL

EDITOR

Christopher John Eggett

01778 392 400

christopher.eggett@warnersgroup.co.uk

ONLINE EDITOR

Charlie Pettit

01778 395 018

charlie.pettit@warnersgroup.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS

George Barker, Anna Blackwell, Debbie Brown, Patrick Buechner, Tim Clare, Jenny Cox, Richard Jansen-Parkes, Dan Jolin, Andy Leighton, Ben Maddox, David Parlett, Richard Simpson, Alexandra Sonechkina, Charlie Theel, Matthew Vernall, Chad Wilkinson

DESIGN

Mike Carr

SUBSCRIBER COVER IMAGE

Homeworld Fleet Command
courtesy of Modiphius

ADVERTISING

TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CALL

COMMERCIAL MANAGER

Charlotte Lewis 01778 391 129

charlotte.lewis@warnersgroup.co.uk

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Nicola Glossop 01778 392 420

nicola.glossop@warnersgroup.co.uk

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Charlotte Bamford 01778 395081

charlotte.bamford@warnersgroup.co.uk

MARKETING

MARKETING MANAGER

Katherine Brown 01778 395 092

katherine.brown@warnersgroup.co.uk

MARKETING EXECUTIVE

Luke Hider 01778 395085

luke.hider@warnersgroup.co.uk

PUBLISHED BY

PUBLISHER Claire Ingram

claire.ingram@warnersgroup.co.uk

Warners Group Publications PLC

The Maltings, West Street, Bourne,
Lincolnshire, PE10 9PH

01778 391 000 warnersgroup.co.uk

NEWSTRADE DISTRIBUTION

Warners Group Publications PLC

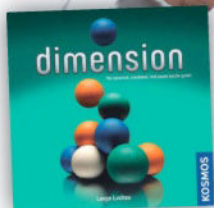
01778 391 150

PRINTING



The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the publishers. Every care is taken to ensure that the content of this magazine is accurate, but we assume no responsibility for any effect from errors or omissions. While every care is taken with unsolicited material submitted for publication, we cannot be responsible for loss or damage. While every care is taken when accepting advertisements, we are not responsible for the quality and/or the performance of goods and/or services advertised in this magazine. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) exists to regulate the content of advertisements. Tel: 020 7429 2222 © Warners Group Publications PLC, 2021

Welcome



**NOW
PLAYING...**
Dimension

Welcome to Tabletop Gaming, your ultimate guide to board games. We've mixed things this month with a brace of new features and a new look. If you're brand new to board games start with The Gateway on page 32. For those of you looking for a little bit of nostalgia, try What's In Your Attic on page 84. Or if you're looking for a next step, check out Connect 4 (p90). And if you're just here for the reviews, we've made this a little bit easier to navigate, breaking the reviews up into loose sections around family and party games, strategy games and roleplaying games. Our main features this month focus on serene space combat game *Homeworld's* arrival on our tabletops (p24), and an investigation into traditional games like Go and Carrom (p46).

You might notice that the price of this issue is a little higher than last month. This is because of increased material prices for producing the mag. The best way to save a few quid is to subscribe, which is now available as a rolling monthly direct debit.

As you may have read, I am stepping down from the magazine in May, so you've got two more issues left with me at the helm. If there's something you'd wish I'd covered in the last three and a bit years, but never said, now's the time to email me about it!

Christopher John Eggett Editor

Get in touch



tabletopgaming.co.uk



tabletopmag



tabletopgamingmagazine



tabletop_gaming_magazine



tabletopgamingmag

QUICKSTART



“The design of the ships that's very reminiscent of the classic Chris Foss 70's style sci-fi art that I loved as a kid had me hooked”

Chris Birch on Homeworld,
p24 ➤

“We just happened to be cartoonists with screwed up senses of humour, finally able to connect with an audience via the internet”

Rob DenBleyker on his Webcomic series Cyanide & Happiness, p30 ➤

“Games like these are successful over centuries because they are easy to learn and yet continue to be challenging, the more you play”

James Masters on the role of traditional games, p48 ➤

AT A GLANCE



Ending soon
KICKSTARTER

ASCENSION TACTICS INFERNO ARRIVES HOT!

After being fully funded in four minutes this huge 50-miniature Kickstarter from Stoneblade Entertainment (recently of *SoulForge* fame) reached its final funding total of over £300,000. This is a full sequel to the original *Ascension Tactics*, which mixed the bombastic fun of miniature battling with the thinky fun of deckbuilding. The new game introduces twelve new champions and hundreds of new cards – as well as a new evil in the form of Arch-devil Kythis. Use the QR code to hop over to the sign up page to pick up a late pledge.



DON'T PANIC! FIRESIDE GAMES RELEASE UPDATED CASTLE PANIC EXPANSIONS

Fireside Games have been updating their line of the classic *Castle Panic*! games, and have now brought out two updated expansions. These second editions are revamped, modern and sleek feeling compared to the 'classic' looks of previous versions. *Engines of War* offers engineers to help you build new defences for your castle (rather than just hoping it doesn't collapse throughout the game). *The Dark Titan* is an expansion designed to give players more of a social angle around the table – because you've all really got to work together to take down a new big bad. Both look to retail for around £20 and should be available in the coming weeks.



KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

\$316.565

How much *Ascension Tactics* made on Kickstarter this month

4

New Awaken Realms Games for 2023

£32K

How much *Achroma*, the evolving card game, raised at Kickstarter

12

The number of cards in a Marvel Snap deck

2

The number of mechs in the *Battletech Beginner Box*

361

The number of points on a full sized Go board

tabletop
GAMING

OUR ALL-NEW
GAMES STORE

TALES FROM THE LONE-LANDS FOR THE ONE RING ANNOUNCED

Free League, everyone's favourite hobbit-botherers have announced their new *The One Ring* setting book. And its typically Free League – if the new version of *The One Ring* injected melancholy into the world of Tolkien, then heading to the north western regions of Middle-earth, where “there were no people left, no inns, and the roads grew steadily worse. Not far ahead were dreary hills, rising higher and higher; dark with trees. On some of them were old castles with an evil look, as if they had been built by wicked people.” Or so the press release claims. No one does a little gloom better; so we're saddling up for adventure already.

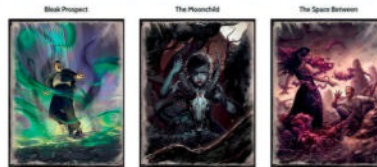


TAILS ON FIRE SUPPORTS TREES FOR THE FUTURE

A newly announced game from Heidelbäer games promises that, despite the theme of burning woodland animals, they will plant a tree for each copy of *Tails on Fire* sold in conjunction with the charity Trees For the Future. The game itself is a kind of bluffing and push-your-luck game where players attempt to be the hottest (literally) possum. The artwork is all inspired by Mexican art, Huichol history and the cute rodents and created by Mexican artist Mayra Guadalupe Ornelas Ramos. The game looks cute, quick, and potentially quite funny when you find out you've just lost out to a player whose only been pretending to be a hot possum.

NAMELESS HORRORS UNLEASHED BY CHAOSIUM

While I go around telling people that *Call of Cthulhu* is the coziest roleplaying game (there's few where you have dedicated skills for mucking about with the car or library use), there is apparently a horror game here somewhere. Enter the second edition of Nameless Horrors, promising to plumb to the depths of the Cthulhu Mythos. The book contains six scenarios across different settings and time periods – including two set in the 2020s. That's right, completely up to date, with *The Moonchild* set in England and *The Space Between* set in sunny LA.



1982: Moonchild during the Great Depression. Residents of a small town face strange forces that prove to be much more than they seem.
2020s: In England, an experiment with the occult goes wrong and brings forth a new horror.
2020s: Los Angeles, California. The star of a film, pursued by a sinister religious organisation, has vanished.

We asked...

What's a game that you do or would bring everywhere with you on the off chance you could squeeze a game in?

You said...

Deep Sea Adventure – and I do!
[@MinervaTabletop](https://twitter.com/MinervaTabletop)

I would and do bring *bastards*. with me to most possible-game-spaces.
[@johnbattle117](https://twitter.com/johnbattle117)





Fun fact: I was able to fit *Caracassonne*, *Catan*, *Splendor*, and I think one other I can't remember into the *Caracassonne* box once, for packing into a carryon for a work trip. Less fun fact: it looks really suspicious to the TSA on the x-ray machine and you get your bag searched.

[@indec](https://twitter.com/indec)

Pitch Car, a guaranteed crowd-pleaser with about thirty seconds of rules explanation. I have taken this to conventions. In a suitcase. On a train.
[@JamesWallis](https://twitter.com/JamesWallis)

Already said in another reply but it's my true answer – *bastards*. Goes wherever I go.
[@MaskNightPrint](https://twitter.com/MaskNightPrint)

Get in touch

 [tabletopmag](https://twitter.com/tabletopmag)
 [tabletopgamingmagazine](https://facebook.com/tabletopgamingmagazine)
 [tabletop_gaming_magazine](https://instagram.com/tabletop_gaming_magazine)
 [tabletopgamingmag](https://youtube.com/tabletopgamingmag)



THE TABLETOP GAMING PODCAST
GET AN EARFUL OF TOP TABLETOP TALK!
DOWNLOAD NOW FROM TTGAMI.NG/TTGPODCAST

VISIT:
tabletopgaming.hooluh.co.uk



1 CARCASSONNE – TILES & TACTICS

A favourite around these parts, the Carcassonne app offers all the fun of the full game, but without having to deal with the sprawl. Available through Asmodee Digital on mobile phones, the Nintendo Switch and Steam in glorious 3D. This is a great 'stuck on a plane, train or in a traffic jam' game as there's a simple Play and Pass mode where you can take your turn and then pass the device on to the next player. This makes the game feel surprisingly close to a physical experience – rather than one where everyone's looking at their phones in the same room. You can of course jump into online games too, if you're lacking an opponent nearby.



2 ROOT

Can anyone remember how to play all of *Root* once it's been on the shelf for a couple of months between wars in the woods? I didn't until I downloaded the *Root* digital game to my phone and I can have a refresh any time I like. It happens to also be a really good implementation of the board game in the digital space (from Dire Wolf digital). The animations are charming, the AI is strong enough to teach you something every game, and if you're like me, it's the best way to reconnect with how it all works in time for you to take it back to the table.



10 OF THE BEST DIGITAL BOARD AND CARD GAMES

Sometimes there's not enough time, room, or energy for all the cardboard – so here's a few of our favourite board game adaptations and a couple of video games that scratch the same itch

Words by **Christopher John Eggett**



3 TWILIGHT STRUGGLE

Some games are a hard sell for certain groups. 'Reliving the cold war' might be your idea of a good night in, spending a minimum of two hours reliving the highs and lows of apocalyptic brinkmanship. Equally, that two hours might not work for you, as much as you want to bathe in the history of the time. In this version of the game there's the merciful online play that is totally asynchronous – instead of worrying about everyone flagging at the table, you can pick up a game with someone around the world over a number of weeks – should that be the pace you want to set. A great way into a great game, even for those who might have been on the fence at the start.

4 HEARTHSTONE

I don't have many games on my phone that get tapped into life as much as Hearthstone. A digital card game (there's no reasonable or playable version of the game for the tabletop) that scratches most of my card game itches. Based in the World of Warcraft universe (I don't understand any of it) it offers digital deck building, pack opening, and battles. Most importantly it offers weird and bombastic this-then-that interactions as various mechanics bounce off one another. Totally free to play, unless you get into the mucky business of buying packs. An excellent waste of time, in the best way.



5 MAGIC THE GATHERING: ARENA

This latest attempt to make the titanic card game work digitally is the best yet. With all of the complexity of the original tabletop game – in theory at least. For those who want to remind themselves of the thrill of *Magic*, this is a great place to start before dropping hundreds of pounds on boosters and cultivating a CardMarket addiction. For those who are used to 'digital first' card games, *Arena* can feel a little less smooth compared to other games on this list. Importantly though, it really is *Magic*. For those who are new to the game it's quick to earn a few preconstructed decks and start your journey – without spending a single penny.



6 GLOOMHAVEN

For some, this is the best way to play *Gloomhaven*. No table sprawl, no real-life admin, just a chill time beating up some skeletons in a dungeon. What many love about *Gloomhaven*, apart from the tight Euro-ish feeling combat resolution, is that epic sense of scale and complexity that the game offers. Here that's all done for you with a big dollop of special effects. If you're gearing up for your first real playthrough of *Frosthaven* then getting to grips with the flow of *Gloomhaven* digitally is a great way to prepare.



7 MARVEL SNAP

Another digital-only card game, but this time with everything turned up to 11. And some superheroes who I hear are super up and coming... Despite its name the snap is more of a Thanos finger-click than the classic matching game we all played as kids. Instead you'll play six rounds of attempting to control a majority of the three locations by playing cards to your side of the board. Different cards have different effects and interactions with each location. This 'area control' aspect, mixed with the small deck size (12 cards!) and extremely cool card design makes for an addictive but strangely-thinky head-to-head puzzle.



8 CATAN

With the release of Settlers of Catan on consoles this month, there's never been a better time to be jumping back into the classic. And the fact it's available on the big screen via your Playstation or Xbox means you can enjoy it in the laziest way possible: passing a controller around on the sofa with snacks. While we're not going to claim it's going to be the new Jackbox for on-tv-party-game fun, but it does sound like a very good way to spend a lazy Sunday morning.



9 SCYTHER: DIGITAL EDITION

If you want big strategy without the big board, then Scythe's digital edition will give you plenty of 1920's dieselpunk mileage for your money. Hop around hexes and expand your domain using your faction's unique powers. Power up and upgrade your faction's strength and take over the world one step at a time. If you like the world enough you can always leave the tabletop altogether and try out Iron Harvest, and adaptation of artist Jakub Różalski's world.



10 WINGSPAN

It's a chill modern classic that's available on PC, Mac and Switch. Collect birds, build them habitats and score points through exciting avian combos. The digital version has the cute benefit that all the birds on the cards flap their wings about, like they've got somewhere to be – now that's what we call a living card game. If you just want a blissed out birdy time without having to crack out the solo rules for the cardboard game, then this is no brainer.



CARDBOARD MANIFESTO

If you're holding the printed version of this magazine, then there is a small chance that you just be a bit of a sniffer. You like the smell of freshly printed pages and you might even like the glue that

binds everything together. I reckon you're also the person that likes the smell of new coffee. Not the cheap stuff, but the more expensive aluminium can with foil seal that you need to pull back and give it a good old strong sniff, breathing in those coffee fumes. I just know you're sitting there imagining it just now. There's nothing like the smell of a good rulebook. There is also nothing better than going through it page by page as the game sits in front of you. Flicking through slowly and trying to take the details in.

Even the bigger rulebooks that take up the size of the box, even the 30cm by 30cm ones. The ones you try to read by balancing them on your lap or trying to balance them on the table and weigh down with meeples until they tip over and scatter components on the floor while you set up the main game on the table, inducing swearing and a wish you'd kept the meeple eating dog in the other room. It's all some big kind of disaster of paper and cardboard. You wouldn't have it any other way. You love the diagrams, the examples, the perfectly laid out information. You like the turn breakdown, all the little illustrations, the component list. You hee-haw at the rule for deciding the first player. The turn reminder and iconography summary on the back of the book makes you all dewy eyed and smiley.

To me there's nothing more painful, nothing more dreadful than having to view a rulebook online through a *device*. The image of the face of someone trying to figure out who passed wind in a room of relatives at a family meal and someone squinting on a mobile trying to view a rulebook is to me, exactly the same. I play games because I'm a Luddite, otherwise I'd be pwning noobs online. I'm good at pwning noobs. I've got a digital trophy and everything. If I'm spending an evening in the company of people face to face, the less screen staring time the better.

On the other side of the argument moon (the darker side), depending on where you have been playing your games, the online rulebook is a given. For those who wish a gathering of magic have been coerced into

LET ME JUST



CHECK THAT...

The host of the We're Not Wizards podcast tells us why online rulebooks are rubbish

Words by Richard Simpson

online rules for a number of years now. When you are running a living and breathing competitive scene, it makes sense for the latest iteration of the core game's rulebook to be able to be updated overnight at the whim of a potential game breaking meta. You can't keep these things to chance, and so if you limit your instructions to one place then you avoid the chances of miscommunication. For something

as established as *Magic: The Gathering*, there are hours of resources to learn games online, even play games online.

For newer games, the online rulebook has the potential to be a barrier for success. The card battling genre became one of my favourites after picking up a copy of *Ashes:*

Rise of The Phoenixborn and when *KeyForge* was announced in all its random glory, I'll admit that I snapped up a few packs to dive in. Only to find to my dismay that only the base rules were explained in the rulebook and it resulted in a session of heads down in contemplation, instead of a shared event of learning and fun. We were lucky at the time that one of us had decided to take the time to read the online version, but at the early learning points when clarification was required, it became more of a hassle to find what we needed than simply flick through a well laid out slightly beefier rulebook. I'm actually still convinced to this day that this form of gatekeeping kept a lot of new players away after the initial energy and resulted in the excitement dying down for *KeyForge* long before it should have. An online rulebook for me is something that is more likely to push the learning

of a new game that bit further down the pile of shame and has always tarnished my first impression of any game.

Some people might argue that the environmental impact of having an online manual instead of a printed one is a good thing. It allows a company to correct previous errors, introduce new examples of play and more importantly keep a channel of communication open with the existing player base. For well established games? Then I'll maybe consider a dip into the digital side of things, but please don't send me something new and groundbreaking if the first thing I need to do is to search my phone to enjoy your crafted fun. Marvel Snap is on there, and that's a battle you'll lose. Trust me on this, the new rulebook will always smell of potential winning, while my phone just smells of grumpy old man second hand back pocket farts. Give me printed rules and evenings with a pile of learning by my side and I'll be a happy person.

Got to go. *Frosthaven* just turned up and apparently there's about eight manuals in that box of delights. Deep breaths. 🍷

IN ISSUE 78

ON SALE 28 APRIL 2023

STAR WARS: THE DECKBUILDING GAME

Does it stand up to the hype? Find out
in our interview and in-depth review

PLUS

All the usual Features,
News & Reviews

**FREE
GIFT***

Flesh & Blood
Booster Pack

*For UK non-subscribers



BUY SINGLE ISSUE COPIES FROM
www.ttgami.ng/single-issue
SO YOU DON'T MISS OUT!

THE SHOP ON THE BORDERLANDS

You think we
haven't got it?
We probably have.



Classic, Out-of-Print & New

- Role Playing Games
- Miniatures
- Board Games
- War Games

New* stuff every week!

*sometimes it was new the first time in 1974.

Free UK shipping on orders over £20
We ship worldwide.

shopontheborderlands.co.uk

www.tritex-games.co.uk

Stafford's Premium
Gaming Store

Win A Free Game
On Us This Month
Scan To Enter



Find us on
Facebook



PATHFINDER

DUNGEONS
& DRAGONS

MARVEL
CRISIS PROTOCOL
MINIATURES GAME

MAGIC
THE GATHERING

POKÉMON

GAMES
WORKSHOP

DICE
THRONE



MARVEL
CHAMPIONS
THE CARD GAME

Carcassonne

CATAN



Role Call

ROLE CALL is here once more, delivering sneak peeks at what's to come in roleplaying

Words by **Richard Jansen-Parkes**



DUNE: THE GREAT GAME - HOUSES OF THE LANDSRAAD

For all the war, worms, and weirdness, *Dune* is ultimately a story about politics, and this digital-only supplement provides you with plenty of it. *Houses of the Landsraad* is packed with interstellar nobility and the complex relationships that govern them, as well as new options for players and GM's alike.

Modiphius | **£18.00**



DOCTOR WHO: ADVENTURES IN SPACE

Doctor Who's stories don't just involve hopping around in history, but also trips across the galaxy – a lot of which just happens to resemble Welsh quarries. This sourcebook for the new *Who* RPG does out rules for creating new worlds and even playing as a set of non-human heroes.

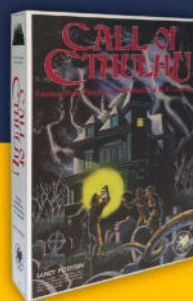
Cubicle 7 | **£29.99**



RIVERS OF LONDON RPG

Description (50 words): Based on the wildly successful novels of the same name, the *Rivers of London* RPG propels players into the sensible boots of some of the great city's latest protectors. The game blends fantastical adventures with good old police procedural action to create a wonderfully unique experience at the tabletop.

Chaosium | **£42.99**



CALL OF CTHULHU CLASSIC BOXED SET

This rather lovely boxed set looks to capture the joys of classic *Call of Cthulhu* without having to trawl eBay or hope to get lucky at a car boot sale. It has rules that can easily be tweaked to match the latest edition and a whole host of old-school booklets.

Chaosium | **£35.00**



TALES FROM THE LOOP: THEY GROW UP SO FAST

Have you ever wished that you could run a *Tales From the Loop* campaign set in the glamorous environs of the Norfolk Broads? Well, this new campaign does just that, linking together four separate adventures set over four different years to create a long-running campaign based right here in the UK.

Free League | **£24.95**

HAVE YOU PLAYED?

BLOODBORNE: THE BOARD GAME



Bloodborne is known for its speed, brutality and gothic horror – things that aren't always easy to recreate on the tabletop. And yet, it's time to dive into this masterpiece of digital-to-tabletop translation...

Words by **Christopher John Eggett**

I have to admit, right from the start, Bloodborne is the only 'SoulsBorne' games I haven't actually played through the whole story of. While I could recount the whole 'plots' of the Dark Souls games (and Elden Ring I guess), Bloodborne isn't a pub quiz speciality. But what all these games do really well is their environmental storytelling. Much about these worlds is obscured. Little of its history is given directly to players, but instead provided in snippets through the descriptions of items, or through cryptic conversations with the various peoples in the world. Bloodborne is a blindspot for me, which might make it a big of a mystery as to why I love this tabletop game so much...

This is just to say we're not here for the lore. Yes, there's cool monsters and creatures from the video game here. Yes, there is atmosphere. But more importantly it keeps the kinetic, dangerous and vicious speed of the actual gameplay of Bloodborne intact. *Bloodborne: The Board Game* is a masterpiece in slick miniatures adventuring because the playing overheads are so small,



and the threats so big. And it's this that's so impressive about it, not because the miniature for Blood Starved Beast is really accurate to the thing that killed you fifty times in the video game.

WHAT IS IT?

Across modular tiles, somewhat randomised, you'll explore the streets of Yharnam to complete a set of mission cards from a variety of chapters that reveal themselves as you explore.. You'll pick a hunter miniature and then take the board that goes with it. Each of these boards comes with three slots, a starter

weapon, and two sides. You'll drop some enemy cards into their slots on the enemy board, and make a little pool of their miniature nearby – and then you're ready to go.

Actually getting around and fighting runs off a tiny deck of cards that you build up throughout the game. You simply discard a card to move zonally into new tiles or across tiles you've already explored. Head into a new area, check the tile you pull of the top of the pile, and spawn enemies and so on. Extremely straightforward so far, and nothing particularly exciting either – right?

But wait, there's deckbuilding. The game lets you buy cards every time you return to the Hunter's Dream (a kind of hub world) by means other than expiring unexpectedly. You'll have collected the game's currency (inevitably just called 'souls' regardless of what the game wants you to call it) and now you'll be able to boost your current little deck of action card by adding a new card to it and replacing one that's already there. This very small hand of cards kind of represents your 'build' in the game. You're able to focus on taking cards that will keep you alive via agility, doing massive damage during attacks, or even giving enemies status effects to make dealing with them easier.

And this brings us to combat. Every SoulsBorne game comes with the balance of 'stamina' and actions. Do an attack, and it will cost you stamina, if you then want to dodge, you might not have quite enough in the tank to make it out of the way in time. It's the real-time resource balancing of the game that people love. In *Bloodborne*:

The Board Game this is represented by the slots on your player board. You can play cards into these slots, use the effect on the card, and then apply it at the speed suggested on the slot. That speed matters when you flip the enemy deck and the speed of their attack is revealed - you'll choosing whether to go in for a big swing, or a little poke to get you over the line.

Now, the thing is, when the enemy attack comes in, you can try and dodge it. It's just going to take a slot to do that. So, if you've just swung a powerful attack towards an enemy, in the hope of finishing it off in one huge effort using your last slot, and it turns out they're about to do something extremely fast and deadly enough to send you back to the Hunter's Dream, then you're about to hear the 'you've died' noise.

And that's great, that's the exciting juggling of resources you want from the game. The enemy deck is also small, so with a bit of card counting you can also memorise the kind of attacks that might come out as you would in the video game too.

One of the notable elements about the video game is that players can transform their weapons into a weird alternative version



that is either more powerful, or situationally useful. That happens here too with the flip of the board. So those slots can be cleared in combat by changing your weapon to its other form, forcing you to adapt your strategy. Not only that, but it brings in an important aspect of any SoulsBorne game, and that is the rhythm and the flow.

WHY SHOULD YOU PLAY IT?

Apart from anything else it's just extremely slick. That rhythm mentioned a moment ago is designed to keep you switching back and forth between two weapons, one of which you might not have optimised for quite as well with your slow deck building. It makes playing the game with others around the table feel a little bit like a dance. You're having to move into your heavy weapon mode, say - well it's time for them to try and use their cards to stagger the enemy for you. If you can get the

composition of your hunters right, then it really can feel like magic.

Also, the enemy AI is simply one where they follow you. If you run away from an enemy on a tile, they'll try and follow you wherever you're heading. This is great if players have split up to cover more ground, and you want to try and kite an enemy back to the main group. It's just a game that allows you to explore the

And what about bosses? They're huge, complex and come with two phases, as you'd imagine. They're tough fights that make the most of your ability to prepare and working out the best way to use the space available to you. Like much of this game, you'll spend feverish turns with your fellow players hoping to survive huge attacks, or getting the needed hits in, and eventually coming up for air - dead or alive. When you look around after you'll simply want to load up the next chapter right away. 🎮

ON THE CARDS

We take a looksee at some of the biggest trading card game news of the month and discover, what's on the cards... Words by **Ross Gilbert**

POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET SEES THE END OF VMAX POKÉMON

The Pokémon TCG is gearing up for the launch of their *Scarlet & Violet* expansion on March 31st and this is the most important new set in three years. This moves the game from *Sword & Shield* into the new "block" of Scarlet & Violet and brings several big changes to the game including the retiring of Pokémon V, VMAX and VSTAR in favour of ex and new Tera ex Pokémon. Illustration rare cards are also coming as a staple in this new block, showcasing some of the most spectacular art ever seen in the Pokémon TCG and giving collectors as well as players a reason to get excited. The price of booster packs is rising slightly but a move from one guaranteed holo per pack to 3 is also happening to soften the blow.



MAGIC: LORD OF THE RINGS ANNOUNCED

Magic win the prize for most interesting crossover this month with the announcement of their *The Lord of the Rings: Tales of Middle Earth* expansion, with an announced released date of June 23rd. The usual lineup of products is here with Set Boosters, Collector Boosters for those looking for more shiny cards, Draft Boosters for fans of limited play, Jumpstart Boosters for those looking to play right away, a Starter Kit for beginners and even four Commander Decks featuring all your Middle Earth favourites.

YU-GI-OH! WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS ANNOUNCED

Yu-Gi-Oh made the announcement many were waiting for this month with confirmation that the World Championships will be held for the first time since 2019. It is planned for August in Japan, which is the place for World Championships this year after the announcements that the Pokémon TCG World Championships will happen in Yokohama (no date yet but it's traditionally held in August) and the Final Fantasy TCG World Championships will happen in Tokyo (no date yet). Yu-Gi-Oh celebrated its 25th anniversary on February 4th with the promise of commemorative products and a variety of promotions worldwide. The first booster set to celebrate the anniversary will be the *Battles of Legend: Monstrous Revenge* set launching on June 23rd, an all-foil set featuring Quarter Century Secret Rares.



ONE PIECE RETURNS

After a spectacularly successful launch marred only by product shortages caused by overwhelming demand, the One Piece TCG is launching its second expansion *Paramount War* on March 10th after Prereleases held the previous week. This set is predictably themed after the *Paramount War* saga and introduces Black cards into the game, alongside the Absolute Justice Starter Deck that launches on the same day. We also saw the first large-scale One Piece TCG tournament held in Birmingham on February 4th and 5th, whose 512 player capacity sold-out in the space of an hour.

AVATAR SET COMING FROM WEISS SCHWARZ

Weiss Schwarz announced a pair of "English Edition Original" expansions that will excite fans of certain franchises. *Avatar* (based on the anime, not the James Cameron movies) launches on June 16th featuring booster packs and a Trial Deck and although details are scarce for now it was announced that *Guilty Gear Strive*, the popular fighting game, will be getting an expansion "soon".



PREMIUM DIGIMON ADVANCE DECKS LANDING SOON

The Digimon TCG is between expansions right now with *Dimensional Phase* recently released and the next expansion not yet officially revealed (at least, as I write this) but we are looking forward to the *Beelzemon Advance Deck* releasing on March 24th. With a suggested retail price significantly higher than previous decks (almost double the previous highest) it has to impress and with special reprint cards and sleeves, as well as chase cards for some lucky people, in addition to an impressive deck, it looks like it might just pull it off.





FREE LEAGUE



It's a turbulent time in the tabletop roleplaying industry. Looking for new RPGs to play? We've got you covered. Free League Publishing has a range of award-winning games in all genres. Free League was voted Fans' Favorite Publisher at the ENNIES two years in a row and Publisher of the Year in the first ever Tabletop Awards 2022.

freeleaguepublishing.com

The Soloist

GOD GAMES

Each month we explore the world solo gaming one move at a time, this month:
God games

Words by **Patrick Buechner**

Solo games are one of the fastest growing and most accessible categories in tabletop gaming. Through crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter and Crowdfunder, and digital marketplaces like itch.io and DriveThruRPG, it has never been easier for independent designers to find an audience.

Today, itch.io alone hosts over 2,100 solo tabletop games with around a dozen added each week.

Journaling games are one of the most popular types of solo games. These games are storytelling engines where a combination of constraints and prompts help you create a unique and personal story impossible in group

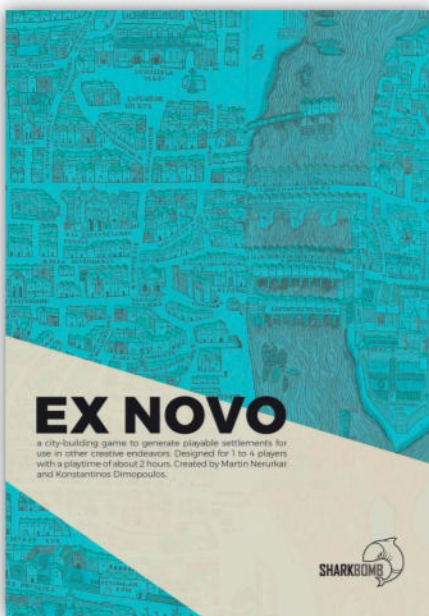
play. The prompts, often chosen with dice or a deck of standard playing cards, challenge you to imagine settings and characters, using a journal to take notes, write dialogue, and illustrate the story.

Solo journaling games come in an almost endless variety of themes and levels of complexity. The solo sci-fi RPG *Ironsworn*:

THREE GREAT SOLO GAMES WITH MAPPING

EX NOVO

Ex Novo by Martin Nerurkar and Konstantinos Dimopoulos puts you in control of a village, town, or metropolis from the moment of its founding. You decide how old and large your city will become. During the founding phase, randomly-generated prompts will help you create a map and give you background on why people settled here. In the development phase, your settlement expands and shrinks; factions rise and fall, populations migrate, old neighbourhoods decline and mighty edifices rise and crumble. Over 200 event prompts help you bring to life the districts, residents, histories, political struggles, and design of whatever type of city you can imagine. Available on itch.io and DriveThruRPG.



DELVE

In *DELVE* by Anna Blackwell, you create an underground dwarven hold, discovering riches and uncovering horrors as you dig deeper. The 44-page rulebook has everything you need to generate natural formations, forgotten ruins, horrible enemies, legendary items and ancient magic. It has rules for constructing a variety of rooms, building defences and recruiting dwarves. Inspired by god games *Dwarf Fortress* and *Dungeon Keeper*, *DELVE* captures the feeling of building and protecting a fortress in an unforgiving subterranean world. All you need to play is a pencil and paper to draw the underground complex, and a deck of playing cards to generate events. The game has a few expansions and two separate versions: *RISE* – a variant about running a monstrous dungeon, and *UMBRA* – a variant about colonising strange alien planets. Available from blackwellwriter.com.

Starforged, has a beautifully designed 400-page rule book that a *D&D* or *Traveller* player would feel right at home with. The lighter *Apothecaria* lets you assume the role of a village witch creating potions for townsfolk, adventurers, and monsters. *Artefact* lets you zoom in and tell the story of a magical relic as it passes through the hands of different keepers.

Some of my favourite solo games let you zoom-out to tell a story from the perspective of a city, kingdom or an entire planet. In video gaming these are called “god games.” If you have built a sprawling metropolis in *SimCity*, designed an underground kingdom in *Dwarf Fortress*, or raised a family in *The Sims*, you know the omnipotent thrill of creating and controlling your own virtual world.

Like their video game counterparts, solo journaling god games empower you to create a world, observe the inhabitants, and make choices with cataclysmic consequences. Unlike their digital cousins, the tabletop versions allow you to customise the game with

your personal interests, experiences and ideas.

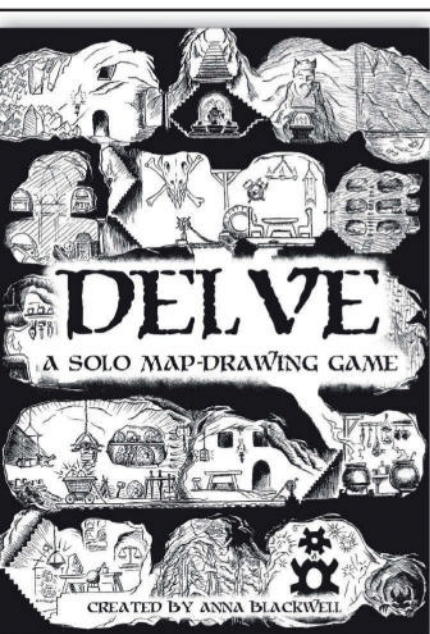
In *Ex Novo*, you create an entire world from scratch – a steampunk city in the clouds, a settlement in a post-apocalyptic wasteland or whatever you can imagine. In one playthrough, I decided to build a small colony on a far off planet. Using randomised prompts from tables of events, I created a story about a small mining settlement where differences over working conditions led to fighting between miners and teamsters, the deployment of a corporate mercenary force, and the rise of a resistance movement.

In *DELVE*, you are the overseer of a new dwarven kingdom, dealing with discoveries and disasters. You decide where to excavate your underground halls, what rooms to build, and what dwarves to recruit. Do you build a kitchen to boost morale or a forge to build Wolf Cannons? Search online and you will find players’ holds drawn by hand, with digital drawing tools and even Minecraft.

And in *The Royal Cartographer*, you create two cultures with complex histories and

then decide which of their landmarks will be recorded on the kingdom’s official map. My final map included the greenhouse where pirates were repulsed when they tried to steal a prized orchid. Excluded was the tomb of a legendary monk who overthrew a corrupt warlord. This game can also be a fantastic tool for developing a setting with detailed lore for your next tabletop RPG campaign.

So if you enjoy playing god – creating, destroying, and telling the story of your own imaginary worlds – check out these games all available on itch.io. And while you’re online, subscribe to my new newsletter on solo and co-op tabletop gaming at soloist.substack.com. It is free and sent right to your mailbox fortnightly. 🍷



THE ROYAL CARTOGRAPHER

In this world-building game created by Albi, you develop two different communities that inhabit a distant corner of a vast kingdom. You define the groups, giving them names and assigning them cultural traits such as agricultural, martial or religious. In the first session, you place landmarks on a provided map that are important to the communities. Themes and events, randomly selected with a deck of playing cards, guide you to develop the story and significance of each location. In the second session, you play the role of a cartographer mapping the area for the regent who has opinions on what should be included on the royal map. Which landmarks will be forgotten to time? It’s a thought-provoking exploration of the power of maps. *The Royal Cartographer* includes rules for both solo and group play. Available from itch.io.



EVENT

TICKET TO RIDE ON A TRAIN

All aboard for an evening of choo-choosing the right route.

SATURDAY 20TH MAY 2023

Join us at Nene Valley Railway for a two-hour ride on a heritage steam train, and play some games too. Leaving from Wansford Station, Peterborough, the train will travel in both directions through the countryside, offering views and the excitement of rail travel.

And if you don't want to play **Ticket To Ride**, or even a game about trains, we'll forgive you for going off track. Bring your own games to the event if you wish, or none at all if you just want to enjoy a ride on a classic engine.



FIND OUT MORE HERE:
www.ttgami.ng/nene-valley

my favourite game

EMILY CHARLES

Emily Charles, the woman behind the throne of the Kingmaker relaunch at Gibson games talks about a few of her favourites

Is there anything better than sitting down with your family and friends for an innocent bit of fun at a civilized games night? I can't think of many things I would rather do... except that our games nights don't usually end up that civilized. It is fair to say that I like to win. Competition is deeply embedded in my family. Growing up, we would hold a tournament on our family holiday each year where we would split into teams and compete for "The Spence Cup" (a homemade trophy fashioned from a juice bottle, some ribbon, and a good imagination).

When I was asked to write this piece, I really struggled to pick just one favourite game. There are just too many that hold my heart and for quite different reasons. So, at the risk of going over the word count, I'm going to try and write about a few of them.

My favourite family games when we were kids were *The Game of Life* and *Go For Broke*. I loved making the family sit down for lengthy periods of time and slog around the board, seeing where life might take us or gambling away all our money. As we got older, we evolved into playing more quick-play party games and I still have a huge collection of those. I could play *Obama Llama* for hours if I could find enough people willing to take me on. I have a strange affinity with rhyming! If Gibsons' game *Out of Order* had been released at the time, I would have brought that out every year for the Spence Cup...Dad would have hated it and I would have loved beating him at it. The mind-bending way you have to remember the answer to the previous question while listening to the next question plays to my strengths and can be incredibly stressful for others.

Now that I have my own young family, I have already introduced my boys to games, although the Spence Cup hasn't come out of retirement just yet. The little one is only two so he struggles to follow the rules, but he really does love bashing those *Hungry Hippos*! My eldest is 4 and he is obsessed with card games. I am incredibly pleased to say that his favourite is a Gibsons Game that I had the pleasure of developing with inventor Emma May - *Quirk*! He loves doing all the impressions and has even got to grips with strategically

using his Stop, Steal and Shield cards to legitimately beat me on many occasions.

Since working at Gibsons I have been introduced to much longer and weightier games than I had ever tried before. It started when I attended UKGE for the first time with a colleague who is a big gamer and he got me started in a very small way with a game of *Carcassonne*. I enjoyed it so much more than I thought I would and immediately bought a copy to take home.

That first UKGE was also the start of my four year journey with *Kingmaker*. We took some games from our archive to the show and were blown away by how many people wanted to talk about *Kingmaker*. I knew that this was a game that we needed to resurrect. It's based on the Wars of Roses, which is a fascinating period of history, and was first designed in the 1970s by Andrew McNeil. What captivated me most about the game was that people seemed to love it despite some glaring issues that kept coming up with the way it played out and how long it took to conclude. I knew that we had a gem on our hands that just needed a little refining.

I got in touch with Andrew and got his blessing to bring it back to market and was then incredibly lucky to be introduced to Alan Paull of Surprised Stare Games and engaged him to work on the redevelopment. Alan has worked tirelessly to create the ultimate version of *Kingmaker*. We have included four different versions in the new edition so that players can play the classic version they know and love, the new version *Kingmaker II*, an extended version of the classic with additional options and variants and even a solo challenge.

I love that every game is so different from the last, and the action can start from the very first turn. In one of our best games, one of the Royals was captured and killed before I had even had my first turn!

The game is currently being manufactured and all the Kickstarter backers will get their copies in the Spring, then *Kingmaker* will official go to retail in the Summer. I can't wait to see the response when it launches and I hope that everyone loves the game as much as I do! 🍷

“It is fair to say I like to win. Competition is deeply embedded in my family. Growing up, we would hold a tournament on our family holiday each year where we would split into teams and compete for “The Spence Cup”

”

HOMEWORLD FLEET COMMAND

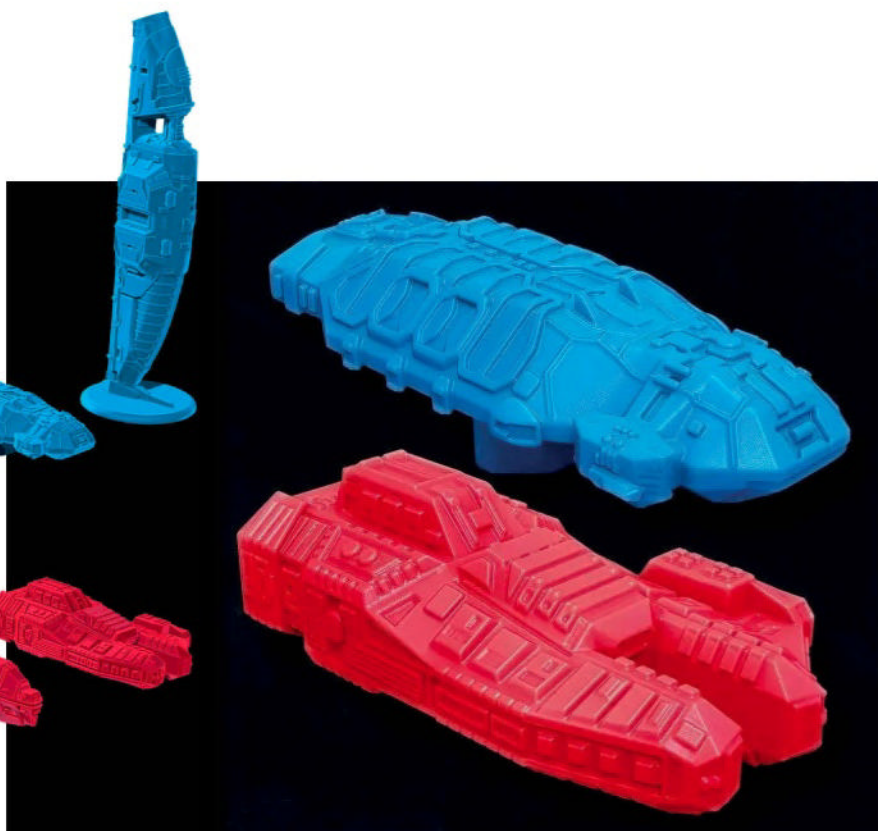
ON FILE

We're going home, and this time it's to an RTS from 1999 as Modiphius tackle the sheer intergalactic scale of Homeworld

Words by **Christopher John Eggett**



ET



Back in the ancient times (by which I mean 1999) there was such thing in the world of video games as a thing called an 'RTS'. That's a real time strategy game for those of you who are blessed to have been born this side of the millennium. There was a time when this was the major form of video games, at least on personal computers. Controlling large swathes of troops, ships, orcs, and so on, in the hope of destroying the enemy base was the name of the game. It was intrinsically competitive – and games like StarCraft, Command & Conquer and Age of Empires maintained a strong tournament scene (and in some cases still do). It possible, if you aren't ancient, that you don't know that World of Warcraft was just, at one time, a premiere fantasy strategy RTS – and it had nothing to do with getting a 'sick mount' at level 65.

But for connoisseurs of the genre, there's really only one game of scope and scale that's worth investing huge amounts of time in. And that's 1999's Homeworld. Whereas the likes of Starcraft and Command & Conquer had a schlocky, slightly silly form of storytelling, Homeworld as one of the best set-ups for... wandering around space fighting everything. And that is that the player's take the role of a race of people called the Kushan, who have had their world destroyed by the

Taliidan Empire. They're simply nomads, in a mothership that can create their fighter craft, attempting to create and deploy enough force into the universe so they can reclaim their ancestral home. The PC game's major selling point was it was 'true' 3D space combat. Not only did players get to command their space forces in the majesty of space, but it really was navigable from above and below. An attack suddenly has much more meaning when it can really come from any direction. The game is one of serene and majestic scenes of space combat, with small fighter ships sweepings and curving through the stars. The soundtrack is the kind of thing that shimmers away in the background.

Now, tasked with jumping into the cockpit of this particular corvette (or, more likely, taking the long view from the mothership) is Chris Birch of Modiphius. Alongside Nick Fallon (who was partially behind the really surprisingly excellent *Kung-Fu Panda: The Board Game*), the team has to find a way of converting the huge scope of the games to the tabletop. The big question is, how are they going to do it?

Hello! Do you mind (re?)introducing yourself to our readers?

Hi I'm Chris Birch, co founder of tabletop games publisher Modiphius and co-designer of *Homeworld: Fleet Command*. ➤

HOMEWORLD FLEET COMMAND



What is *Homeworld Fleet Command*?

It's a fast paced easy to learn game of epic fleet battles in the Homeworld RTS video game universe packed with over 100 plastic minis of ships in the base game, and another 100 in the expansion with lots of new rules including campaign play. The game is designed to let you play really big fleet battles in a short time, and in a small gaming space – typically inside a 3x3ft table.

Is there a story? What's the background?

The scenarios of the base game loosely follow the missions in the first Homeworld video game where the Kushan must travel across the galaxy to find their homeworld Hlgara, dogged by the fleets of the Taiidan empire all the way.

How are we commanding these fleets?

What's the main gameplay loop?

The leaders you choose to command the ships, give you a number of Command cards in your hand, and a number that you can play each turn. You play these cards to move one or more squadrons of ships or Super Capitals ships across the board to attack the enemy. Clever tactical play of the Command cards can lead to victory but be careful as the enemy can use Interrupt cards they may have at any time to stop you in your tracks and move away, attack or more. The big carriers and Mothership of the Kushan fleet can harvest asteroids for resources to build new ships to reinforce your fleet, you can board other ships or space stations, acquire tech upgrades for your ships in campaign play and more.

So, is it a wargame?

It's a wargame masquerading as board game, so kind of! Probably in the best traditions of the old hex war-games but with beautiful ship minis and literally LOADS of ships, plus a light and airy game system that means you can play a couple of fleet battles in an evening

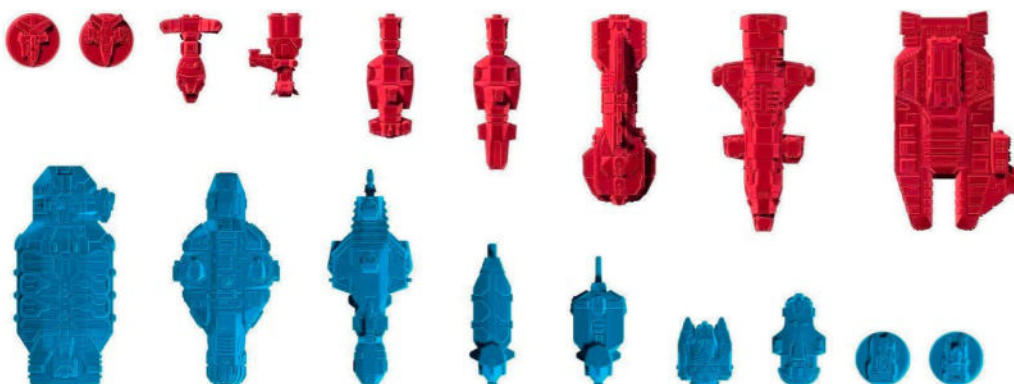


Can you tell us about the feel of the game – it looks like one of those games where you're making huge, sweeping moves, and positioning might be a big part of it?

Typically games last 6-10 turns, and that can go quite quickly, ships can die fast. It's why you have squadrons of ships – if you take damage you're literally losing ships. You can plan tactics and the Command Cards you get give you interesting tactical combinations along with the special abilities of each ship type. How you build your fleet and which ships you bring to a battle is a key consideration alongside the balance of leaders you have that give you more or less cards to play.

Tell us about the miniatures in the game – I always think spaceship design must be a bit like designing a high-end trainer – how do you make these minis meaningful?

You have to remember this isn't a big skirmish ship game with super detailed massive ship miniatures like Armada. You're going to be commanding multiple squadrons of large frigates, then bigger destroyers and carriers. Even



the carrier and destroyers are only about 45mm long. The fighters are about 14mm across in comparison so it's a much smaller scale. A frigate squadron is 2 ships, a corvette squadrons is 3 ships, a fighter squadron 6. Get all the ships on the board and you'd have 50 ships a side in the base game. So the ships sit on the board as board game pieces not wargame ships – we designed them so they'd look like they were slightly floating but some details had to be simplified to make these in such a small scale and in plastic. For example any major raised details were abstracted or simplified, even so they look pretty cool though when you see your whole fleet lined up. We're also making a set of more detailed resin flagships as an add-on which are more detailed thanks to the resin process.

Why make a Homeworld game? What attracted you to the series? Is it a long-loved favourite?

It was the second or third RTS I played after Command & Conquer and it was the first that had 3D movement in a pc game and let you command such big fleets of ships. That and the design of the ships that's very reminiscent of the classic Chris Foss 70's style sci-fi art that I loved as a kid had me hooked. When the opportunity came up I jumped as I'd always wanted to work on a space fleet game having grown up on a diet of classic sci-fi books and movies.

It's expandable in a super cool and simple way, tell us about the 'add extra boards' concept? Is that a call back to a kind of gaming I don't remember, or a totally new thing?

Well the expansion box adds another 100 ships – basically doubling your fleet so you have a second sculpt of fighters, corvettes, frigates and adds heavy cruisers. It adds Heroic

Leaders, Tech Upgrades, Campaign play, stealth fighters, Barrage weapons, Nebula, planetary facilities and a second board so you have more choices of art or you can combine both boards for bigger battles.

The Grand Admiral pledge which has over 440 ships adds 6 more boards so you can have up to 8 boards – they're actually fairly small but even so we wanted to let people build even bigger play spaces with huge tactical battles for 4 opposed teams or allied fleets, so up to 8 players or even more.

And the solo mode! How does it play? How does it feel?

In the base game the solo mode is pretty easy. Instead of a hand of cards you draw a command card each turn for the AI player and a table lists this card and which unit should activate based on it, and what its target should be.

However we're also unlocking a Solo Player's Guide which can also be used co-op. This is a toolset to play anything from a quick one-off battle to a connected series of missions telling your story with a campaign overlay. You'll start with just the Mothership and a couple of fighter squadrons and work your way up researching new unit types, just like in the video game. You'll procedurally generate scenarios and objectives, from getting across the board safely to raiding space stations for tech upgrades. With luck, good tactics, and investing in the right ships, you'll be the Fleet Commander leading the Kushan to victory!

And how about the campaign? Is that solo/co-op or is there a head to head way to play it?

The Campaign mode lets you play through all the scenarios in the base game or expansion,

and in the missions you can earn medals, these medals can now be spent to purchase tech upgrades for your ships or heroic leaders with unique command cards. You still have to actually buy them for a scenario so the game remains balanced but it's a really fun way to give yourself more interesting tactical options with the fleets at hand.

We're about to unlock the solo – co-op players guide which I mentioned above and that can be played on your own or together with friends as a campaign.

What's coming next for this series or system?

We'll we've got plenty unlocked to keep us busy for the game – the Homeworld Revelatons RPG is getting a big campaign book that follows the events of Homeworld 1 but seeing the personal side, and adds some extra storyline. With the success of the Kickstarter we're going to be exploring more products for later on.

And what's coming next for you and Modiphius?

We have the *Cohors Cthulhu* RPG and wargame Kickstarter coming in the summer – I'm currently testing the solo/co-op wargame which is designed to get you playing straight away and having a lot of fun. There's a lot more in the works for all the big lines, but we're also unveiling a brand new IP at Gama and launching at GenCon – something I've been working on for a few years so that's the big exciting event.

Homeworld Fleet Command is currently taking late pledges on Gamefound. Brave commanders can sign up through the pledge manger here: www.homeworldfleetcommand.com

CATAN

— CONSOLE EDITION —

TRADE, BUILD, SETTLE
A BOARD GAME THAT COMES TO LIFE!



OUT NOW ON

XBOX SERIES X|S XBOX ONE PS5 | PS4

Copyright © 2023 CATAN GmbH - CATAN, "CATAN - Console Edition", the CATAN logo, the "CATAN Sun," and the CATAN Brand Logo are trademark properties of CATAN GmbH (catan.com). All rights reserved. All copyrights and trademarks used under license from Asmodee Entertainment Ltd. The Asmodee Entertainment logo is ©, ™ 2023 Asmodee Entertainment Ltd. Nomad Games is the registered trademark of Nomad Games Limited. All rights reserved. Published by Dovetail Games, a trading name of RailSimulator.com Limited ("DTG"). "Dovetail Games" is a registered trademark of DTG. All rights reserved.

around the world in 80 plays

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Words by **Chad Wilkinson**

East of the coast of Venezuela sits the dual-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps an oddity amongst other surrounding Caribbean islands, Trinidad and Tobago possesses a wealth accrued through industry rather than tourism. But, with all sharing a complex history of indigenous displacement, colonisation, and demographics tied to a lineage of slavery, aspects of the islands' culture have evolved in tandem – including games.

As is typical for such nations, much indigenous knowledge has been lost. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, recognition of the islands' gaming history doesn't seem to appear until the 1800s, when 'labourers' from India played games that had become popular during their migration. Filling the labour gap left by African slaves following abolition, Indian workers played a mixture of physical, gambling, and word and memory games. Guessing games such as Eka buka often combined gameplay with song, with players reciting particular chants whilst predicting the contents of closed fists. Team sports games like Kabaddi (still played today) and stick-fighting also incorporated various chants. Smaller scale pastimes such as Patchi, marbles, and spinning tops were also popular, with the former using cowrie shells as dice for gambling.

One consequence of Trinidad and Tobago's colonial history is the introduction of All Fours, a traditional trick-taking card game which now holds the status of being the country's national game. Purportedly conceived in 17th century Kent and likely imported during Britain's takeover of Spanish rule at the turn of the 18th century, All Fours became popular amongst the Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-trinidadians across the islands' sugarcane plantations.

Gaming hasn't gone away in modern Trinidad and Tobago, but its contemporary incarnation differentiates itself largely by not being a product of negative circumstance. Within a wealthy island nation, gamers have the access to the tabletop world's global market needed to foster a growing hobby. This growth is perhaps best represented by the existence of gaming centred cafes and clubs – namely Gamer's Trove in San Fernando and Board at Home in Couva. Both possess vast libraries of contemporary games and host regular events and competitions, whilst also building communities with the help of social media.

From these communities, a handful of gamers have taken to designing games themselves, the most prolific being Couva based teacher and owner of Board at Home, Christopher Naranjit. His first game was *Not a Real Place* (NARP), a *Monopoly* parody with mechanics for familiar themes of corruption, nepotism, and potholes. Some of his inspiration came from the already extant *Triniopoly*; a giant, handcrafted, localised take on monopoly, available for rental. Its adventures around the country can be followed on Instagram.

Naranjit's latest game is *Buyin' Scrap: Old Battery Buyin'* – a name taken from a regionally recognisable scrap dealer slogan. Naranjit notes that his main goal was that the "name of game would do half of the marketing for me." Mechanically, the game was inspired by an old Indian gambling game but its unique theme sees



players bidding for the most valuable scrap in order to deck out their living rooms.

Another locally popular game is the pandemic inspired *Lockdown 2020*. Created by Kimberley Joseph to distract and educate her daughter during lockdown, the project soon saw distribution after enthusiastic responses on social media. Whilst its theme is uncomfortably universal, Joseph did also design the game to have a distinct "Trini-style."

This month's exploration has demonstrated that games don't always stem from a place of positivity. Trinidad and Tobago serves as an example that games can crop up in both times of strife and prosperity – a quality that speaks to the endurance and universality of gaming. 🎲



THE REMIX

We jump into the world of remixing webcomics with Rob DenBleyker

Words by **Christopher John Eggett**

The internet. We've all been there. For those who have been there a long time they might remember the world before social media and smartphone became the major way of engaging with it. Before that there were lots of websites where people were working out what the internet was for. This was long before the advent of easily streamed video, although it was the heyday of music 'piracy'. Everyone knew it was going to kill all print, especially newspapers (that's gone well so far hasn't it?) and so looked at that for inspiration. It was just how people understood what the 'content' of the internet would look like.

But it was vaguely anarchic, as much as anything

can be sitting down in an office chair in front of a keyboard. Websites like NewGrounds made a portal for people (read: teenagers, children and underdeveloped adults) to share Flash games (flash was an animation tool, partly killed off by Adobe and Apple in the 2010s and finally sunset for good in 2021), and others were hustling to make their little dreams seen by others. That was the promise of the internet, although we didn't know how it would end up, that you could communicate with everyone – without any barriers.

And so the world of webcomics appeared. Usually daily, these short handful of panels would be one of the places people of a certain vintage looking for *something* to look at on the internet would click around to. They were mostly made by bored teenagers and young people who wanted to make jokes for their friends. Often they would be crudely drawn, or using the same panels with different written content each day. It was a bit experimental and a bit homespun, but it was as legitimate as anything that could be made at the time.

And so we come to Cyanide & Happiness, a longrunning attempt at finding the edgy humour in daily life and off-colour jokes. Explosm, the company formed around the comic once it took off has now also released two games. The first *Joking Hazard* is a 'remix the comics' style game where individual panels from the comic are used to make the best/worst jokes, depending on your sense of good taste. The later, *Master Dater* is a dating sim game where players are mixing and matching their character and then arguing about who should get to go on the date. It's not quite *Blind Date*, but it's blind-date-with-a-bit-of-arguing.

We spoke to Rob DenBleyker, the creator of Cyanide & Happiness about making these comics, the games and even asked the team to put together an exclusive comics just for us.



Hello! Can you introduce yourself for our readers? I'm Rob DenBleyker, one of the creators of Cyanide & Happiness.

And what is Cyanide & Happiness?

Cyanide & Happiness is a daily webcomic and weekly animation series that started way back in 2005.

For the old people at the front and the very young people at the back, could you explain the whole webcomics culture that appeared in the 2000s? Where did this explosion come from?

Webcomics emerged in the late 90s and early 2000s. Basically as soon as you could upload JPGs to the internet, people started posting cartoons. Without the hassle of editors or newspaper syndicates, anyone could start a webcomic, and a ton of great strips that could never appear in a newspaper began appearing.

While it is a comic strip, it's not for kids, what's it like approaching bigger subjects (or mocking them) in this medium?

Without the inherent censorship that comes with newspaper standards, webcomics for adults



Tell us then about Joking Hazard? Where did the remix idea come from?

In 2015 we launched a feature on our website called the Random Comic Generator, which created a random three panel comic from hundreds of pre-drawn panels. There were over 20 million combinations. The Random Comic Generator became a huge hit, and one day we just decided to print out the hundreds of panels and see if it was as much fun to play with on a table. Joking Hazard very quickly emerged. After about a year of testing and balancing, we launched it on Kickstarter.

punchline wins, sometimes the saddest one wins, and no two games are alike.

And what about Master Dater?

Master Dater is a bit different than *Joking Hazard*, and puts the creativity even moreso in the hands of the player. It's a game about combining a head and a body to create a perfect date, and arguing your way toward winning three very specific interest cards (or as many of the three as you can). It's a game that involves extreme pandering, creative arguing, and a lot of completely absurd conversations.

Can you give us some examples of extremely niche dates that might go ahead?

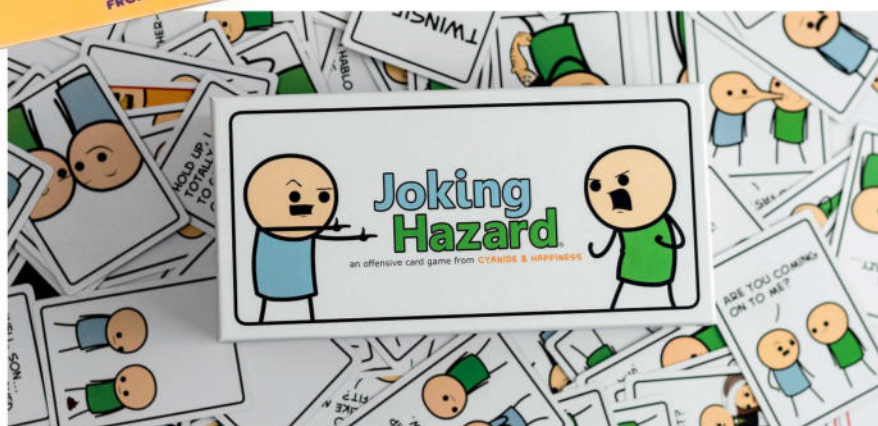
One of the most recent winning dates was "Batman Peeing on a Cat". The player managed to win all three interest cards, which were "I need someone who can lend me a couple bucks", "I'm interested in listening to sad music in the dark" and "I have 27 cats and could use some help". No other player could compete.

You've got other games coming up, what should we be on the lookout for?

We have a few games in development, but it's too early to announce what they are. We're very excited to show more when the time is right!

What's next for C&H and Explosm?

We've got a weekly animated series on YouTube, the sequel to our 2021 video game on the horizon, and a lot more animated stuff on the way. We hope to continue putting weird stuff on the internet as long as we can! 🎮



became fairly common, Cyanide & Happiness being one of the largest. I don't think we were trying to be edgy or dark with our humor, we just happened to be cartoonists with screwed up senses of humor, finally able to connect with an audience via the internet. Another benefit of webcomics is we could post them as animated GIFs. Can't do that in a newspaper!

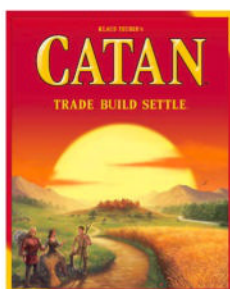
What kind of gamer is it for?

Joking Hazard is for Cyanide & Happiness fans, and also anyone who enjoys creative storytelling with a dark sense of humour. The game is more open-ended than other "impress the judge" party games because instead of just pairing a question & answer, you're creating a tiny 3-panel story. Sometimes the funniest

THE GATEWAY SETTLERS OF CATAN

Welcome to the world of hobby gaming. This month we're starting with a classic: Catan. Build towns and roads, gain resources, and make enough points first to come out on top

Words by **Christopher John Eggett**



You and your 3-4 friends are settlers in a new land, and you're hoping to have a good and prosperous life. To do this, you'll need

to set out and make settlements where you can get the resources you need to survive. Once you have these resources you can expand your settlement by adding roads, and then build connected settlements at the other end. Each road and settlement costs a certain amount of resources to build, which are the cards in your hand. If you don't have enough for what you need, you can ask to trade around the table – there's really no limit on how this works, so if you can drive a hard bargain, you'll probably come out on top. Or alienate everyone from trading with you in the future.

How do you win? The first player to have 10 points total is the winner. You can count your points any time by looking at the board and cards you've played. Usually you'll need to have built a few settlements and cities, and maybe claimed a 'longest road' or 'biggest army' card for some bonus points.

If you love the simple thrill of building a little empire, making smart choices about where to place your settlements and bartering with other players, *Catan* is the game for you. It's a relaxed game that focuses on making a few little decisions each turn, and eventually building up to tipping your collection of points just over the edge. A great game for a couple of beers and a fistful of snacks. And once you've mastered *Catan*, the rest of the hobby world is your oyster (or wood, or sheep...).

BARGAIN WITH YOUR FRIENDS, AND UNLEASH YOUR INNER ALAN SUGAR

BUILD YOURSELF A LITTLE EMPIRE

YOU GET TO ASK PEOPLE IF THEY HAVE WOOD FOR SHEEP

HOW TO PLAY

A quick guide to what you do on your turn...

1 ROLL THE DICE, GET RESOURCES

And get your resources. If you have a building on a corner of the resources rolled draw one for each settlement and two for each city of that resource type.

If you rolled a 7 then you need to move the robber. Wherever the robber is, that area does not produce any resources when its number is rolled. This is a great time to get someone back for not trading your two wood for sheep.

2 TRADE

This is where you get to ask other players if they've got wood for sheep. If you want a resource, and are willing to trade from your hand of resource cards, ask around the room to find someone willing to take a deal. There's no real limit to this, so you can 'overpay' or drive a hard bargain as much as you want. For some, this is the best bit of the game and where a lot of the fun banter of the game comes in. If you don't want to trade with other people, you can always swap four of one resource into one of another, or trade using ports if you have a settlement on one.

3 BUILD

Spend cards in your hand to build the stuff you want to build! Everyone gets given a building cost card at the start of the game, so you can check that if you're not sure. You can build settlements at least two road spaces away and should look to gain access to those useful numbered hexes nearby. You can also upgrade your settlements to cities, which give you two resources when rolled, rather than just one. If you can't or don't want to build anything, then you can always buy a development card – these let get you points, bonuses, or special actions (like moving the robber and stealing a random card from someone). Once you've done all this, it's the next person's turn. Not that you should relax, you could be thinking about what trade you're about to offer them.





WINNING

Winning the game is a race to 10 'victory points'. You can count these up from the settlements (one point) and cities (two points) you've built, whether you have the longest road (two points), the biggest army (two points), and victory point development cards (one point). When you have ten, you win.

STRATEGY

Catan is very much a game about the luck of the dice, and bartering in our experience.

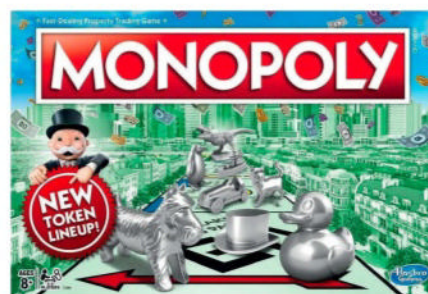
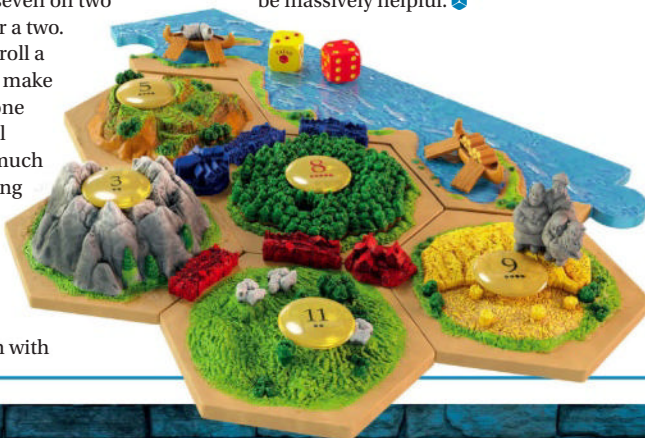
Location, Location, Location: Each turn starts with a roll to decide which area will produce resources. As you probably know, it's much easier to roll a seven on two six sided dice than a 12 or a two. And it's nearly as easy to roll a six or an eight. If you can make your first placement on one of these very likely-to-roll numbers you're in for a much better chance of generating resources throughout the game with ease.

Cut a Deal: Some get a bit nervous about this part of the game, to begin with

anyway. On a player's turn they can be traded with. That means if you need something, and they might just have it, it's time

Focus on Self-development: If you're not sure what to do on your turn, or you're a long way off making the big play you want to

Remember to Cash in: There's a number of ways to trade in multiples of a single type of card into one of another type. The first is available to all, which is trade four of one type of card into one of another. The other is building a port (you can see the boats at the docks on the board). Build there and get that specific bonus – say three of anything for one of another, or two rock for one of any other. If your resource-generating engine is stalling, or seems stuck on one type of card, then this can be massively helpful. 🚢



TRY IT IF YOU LIKE...

The house and hotel building in *Monopoly*
The bartering and resource swapping of *Pit*



KING OF MONSTER ISLAND

Teamwork with titanic tussles

Designer: Richard Garfield | Publisher: IELLO



Oh I see how it is, when we're trashing beloved capital cities we're "monsters" and "need to be stopped," but the moment something threatens to bury the whole world in magma, we're now "titans" and "actually quite cool?" Well since you asked so nicely, I guess we can put aside our city stomping activities and various past grudges to defeat the *King of Monster Island*.

It's been a few years since Richard Garfield has explored the delightfully silly *King Of...* series, with *Monster Island* taking the original's battle *Yahtzee* concept and shifting your attention away from destroying your friends, to instead facing a new cardboard creature from the depths of Earth's molten core.

Each player is a giant monster (with five new B-Movie beast designs to add to the already overflowing menagerie of cross-compatible colossi) tasked with defeating the Lavalord and its many minions. The titular *Monster Island* game board is divided into six sections surrounding one of my favourite board game components of all time, a *volcano dice tower* that scatters enemy boss dice across the board.

On each player's turn, they'll begin by dropping boss dice through the volcano. The boss monster (chosen from one of three options at the start of the game, each with a scalable difficulty level for added replay value) will lumber its way towards whichever nearby zone has the most dice, activating any minion tokens there before resolving dice. Minions pepper players with damage or build crystals, which when complete will create game-ending pylons, making it your highest priority to stop the enemy finishing their gem-based interdimensional portal. Once minions have had their hijinks, the boss dice are resolved, often showering the board with more minions, but can also empower the boss or even build crystals as well. Each boss has its own unique power that slowly increases as the game



continues, encouraging players to respond quickly before things get out of control.

Finally, it's time for you to strike back! From here the mechanics will be very familiar to anyone who's played either *King of Tokyo*/*New York*; players will have up to four rolls of their cathartically weighty dice to

generate the desired values for the most pressing issue. These include claws and stomps to dish out damage to the pesky blighters and speed around the island, healing hearts and repairing spanners to rejuvenate your force, energy used to buy power cards and finally fame, which empowers that player's unique ally.



Said allies help give your monster a more dedicated role in the group. Once you've gained a single fame, you can choose one of the available ally sheets (decided randomly at the start of the game, again to give your playthroughs a dash more variance) which offers unique powers to your beastie. Maybe you'll be matched with a team of mad scientists, further expanding your energy potential to buy better cards? Or perhaps a construction crew of Ape Monsters will help you better reinforce the board with support tiles to give your teammates a helping hand/tendril?

Ah yes, the support tiles. Another way humanity is helping you and your band of behemoths, roll enough spanners and you can dock a support ship in your current section, providing any monster in this space with its printed resource, but then requiring someone else to "ready" it back for future use.

And with that, I've pretty much taught you the entire game. *Monster Island* succinctly delivers in its promise to create a co-operative version of the beloved dice flinging classic and has done so with gleaming results. *IELLO* have truly outdone themselves this time with this production, as not only do we get all of the expected accoutrements from this series, such as the ever satisfying oversized player dice and appealing monster designs, even the tiny minion titles ooze character as they seep lava and misery onto the board. It cannot be overstated how gorgeous the game looks once set up, your eyes forever

entranced by the gloriously silly volcano dice (it's probably for the best that its six exits make it less than ideal for tabletop roleplaying, as otherwise it'd likely break it through overuse.)

Even with such delicious eye candy, the legibility of the board is never in doubt, with each token and design distinctive enough to tell at a glance what's causing issues and where. I also very much appreciate the clean layout and joyously silly illustrations of the ally sheets. Having each sheet be double-sided to give players a handy game aid is so greatly appreciated, making it a game where you'll rarely ever need a rule explained to you twice.

So, it's a well executed co-operative adaptation of a beloved family favourite with impeccable production qualities, surely this is a Must Have title? So about that...

Yes, the game does deliver a beautifully demonstrated and engaging adaptation, but "Adapt" is the key word here. There is very little here that brings something new or unseen to either the *King of...* series or co-operative dice games. The ally roles are all very wonderfully realised, but no amount of wonderful illustrations will hide the fact that they are very cookie cutter archetypes of healer, damage, support etc.

The previous two titles in this franchise put a heavy emphasis on players being able to self-balance when someone overextends, becoming a threat to everyone's chances of success that would cause an explosion of conflict to keep the

pace quick and players engaged. Here you'll often find one player being positioned as the team's powerhouse, either by combination of the right powers and ally or simply because they've just rolled the luckiest. As the seesaw tips in their favour, someone else will be on the other end, spending their turns enabling the golden goliath and making them feel tertiary to the team dynamic.

This feeling of being a supporting character to other player's big moments is made all the more painful in larger group sizes. Player turns in *Monster Island* take time to wade through the Boss actions sequence, then followed by the player's actual turn, where deliberating which dice to keep is crucial but pace killing. If you have someone who struggles with analysis paralysis, you better make sure the table is well stocked up with snacks as your playtime slowly stretches past its hour of expected play.

The best cooperative games find multiple tasks that require different approaches to overcome, but *Monster Island* is restricted in how much variation it can provide when every facet of the game must be pushed through the core mechanic of "roll dice well," something many players struggle to fully engage with given how luck-centric dice play is by design.

So, this game may not be the most original and if you've had too many bad experiences with one bad roll dooming an entire game, steer clear of this *isla de destrucción*. However, if instead you either love co-operative games, adore the *King Of* series' sense of silly yet spectacular moments of high stakes dice rolls or just want a fantastically polished game to add to your friendly game nights, *King of Monster Island* gives you a big beautiful box of beasts that provides hours of kaiju catastrophic charm. 🍌

MATTHEW VERNALL

PLAY IT? YES

By giving everyone a shared enemy to throw handfuls of punishment at, *King of Monster Island* transitions its high rolling, high stakes gameplay into a charming co-operative title, but if you never got on with the other *King of...* titles, the core mechanics are mostly the same here.

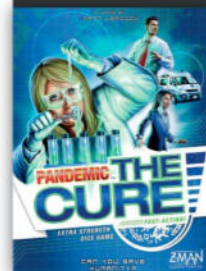


WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Instructions
- ▶ 6 Tracker boards
- ▶ Game board
- ▶ Cloth bag
- ▶ Plastic 3D dice volcano
- ▶ 10 Monster dice
- ▶ 8 Boss dice
- ▶ 8 Cardboard figures
- ▶ 9 Play sheets
- ▶ 66 Cards
- ▶ 68 Cardboard tokens
- ▶ 56 Plastic energy tokens

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED: PANDEMIC: THE CURE

Rolling dice to save the world, both games put working together at the forefront of overcoming the odds, with *The Cure* offering more player uniqueness and *Monster Island* letting you roll for high risk, high reward results.



READY SET BET

A game that will make you shout so much you'll become a little hoarse

Designer: John D. Clair | Publisher: AEG



We forget, sometimes, when we sit down to our regular games, that these things can be events. They can have the pupil dilating impact of the big top. They can encourage all of those warm trembles that happen when you bathe your brain in delightful enzymes. Interface with any kind of art regularly enough and the majority of your time spent with it becomes normal. A gentle satisfaction rather than a blazing reverie. Then, sometimes, a game comes along that blows the bloody doors off. That rubber bands you back to those nerve-jangling days of the neophyte. All laughs and serotonin, wonder and grace. They remind you of why you got into these things in the first place, before calluses formed on your fun receptors and you became jaded.

Ready, Set, Bet did that to me. From the first round of play I was catapulted, head first, into what the best games make you do. Laugh and remonstrate and care altogether too much about something utterly inconsequential but not enough that it ruins your day.

Ready, Set, Bet is incredible fun and as moreish as a pferdeleberkase semmel (look it up).

In *Ready, Set, Bet* we play punters at the kind of race track that features in 60s Disney movies rather than the ammonia drenched depression holes that are most British bookmakers and we try to fight the forces of chance and idiocy to make the most money.

That's what most of the players are doing but one brave soul will be the race caller and the whole game revolves around them as they manipulate mechanisms that are so straightforwardly effective that game designers everywhere cry in despair that they didn't come up with them first.

Two six sided dice are rolled and the possible results correspond to a horse in the field. There is a number seven horse and so on but the numbers eleven and twelve and one and two straddle



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 32 VIP Cards (standard)
- ▶ 28 Prop Bet cards (mini)
- ▶ Race Track Board
- ▶ Bet Board
- ▶ 152 Money Chip tokens
- ▶ 52 Bet tokens
- ▶ 6 House Bet Tokens
- ▶ 2 Six-sided dice
- ▶ 9 Wooden horse Meeples
- ▶ 8 Result Arrow Tokens



a single horse as these outcomes are exceptionally rare. If the number of the horse is rolled the horse moves forward a space. If the same number is rolled again the horse receives bonus movement based on how likely that second appearance is. The number seven horse gets no bonus but the eleven/twelve horse gets a bonus of three. The race caller announces this to the players who get suitably hysterical.

This is because the players are laying down chips on a betting board as the dice are being rolled. This board offers rewards for the placing of horses in the field and penalties for wrong guesses. The players can place their chips until three horses have crossed a red line two thirds along the track then all betting ceases and the players bite their nails to nubs until the race is over.

In addition there are exotic bets for specific placements and every round the punters will get special powers that yield them greater betting power or the ability to win small amounts if certain numbers are rolled. When the race is over players collect their winnings, pay their debts and move on and after four races the person with the most money can think

they've had one over on luck. They'll learn though...

This game is always a riot. It does a wonderful job of modeling concepts that we are all familiar with in a gracious and easily graspable way. The tension at the end of the race is palpable and the potential rewards and penalties are enough to keep you invested all the way through. Have one good race and you could be catapulted from last to first. Such is the allure of gambling. Also the confined spaces on the board guarantee loads of that wonderful interaction between players that is the bedrock of quality experiences.

This is the thing about *Ready, Set, Bet*, it turns game night into an occasion. So many of our most enduring memories are those times when we laugh uproariously with others and every game of *Ready, Set, Bet* ensures this and I defy anyone not to be drawn in by its charms.

There is an app that will run the race for you but in any group there will be one person who loves taking that role and if they're good at it they will elevate the experience far higher than a few lines of sterile code ever could. This is a game about humans and their irrationality and any intrusion of the silicone seems to detract from that. The fact that this player doesn't actually "play" the game is not to take anything away from the game at all. A good race caller makes this game. They can turn it from very good to special.

Ready, Set, Bet achieves everything a great game should. There is no effete opacity here. You play this game and you feel brilliant. That makes this a must-play for me. ●

BEN MADDOX

PLAY IT? MUST-PLAY

This game is pure excitement in a box and dies what games were meant to do.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED WAVELENGTH

This is a true party game and is perfect for large gatherings...



DISNEY SHADOWED KINGDOM

Designer: Darth Rimmer | Publisher: Mondo Games

Despite not being a huge Disney fan, this diminutive box intrigued me. With a moody aesthetic akin to *Epic Mickey*, memory elements, and allusions to *The Mind*-like silent gameplay, I had high hopes.

This two player game – made up of a few cards and tiles – sees our beloved and be-gloved rodent sourcing Magic to help battle the encroaching threat of Doubt spreading across the land. This plays out – very much abstractly – across a grid of four facedown cards, which, during a turn, will be manipulated by either adding a card to push another out of a column where it will be ‘Discovered’, or slide one out of a row whereupon it’s ‘Dispelled’. Discovered cards will be taken, activated, and then kept by the second player who then mirrors the process back. Dispelled cards are discarded, with the second player consequently drawing and

activating the top card of their deck.

The hope is to reveal enough Magic cards to fill the corresponding track whilst limiting Doubt’s progress by discarding cards. Ideally, an idea of what’s where and what’s what should become mutually clear, but an over dependence on luck and too frequent reshuffling severely limits this. This frustrating negation of memory-based strategies, points toward a notable lack of agency – a feeling exaggerated by having turns revolve around *having* to play your oldest card (from a hand of two). The luxury of even the most basic of choices is simply taken away.

Another luxury stamped out is the ability to talk. Despite being a trait and highlight of other games, here, in its strategically dampened context, it amounts to playing a frustrating and dull game in silence. Essentially, it’s not fun.



Furthermore, being a licensed game, publishers should at least maximise its accessibility by avoiding unnecessarily ambiguous rules rendered in microscopically small font. ●

CHAD WILKINSON

PLAY IT? NO

SYNC OR SWIM

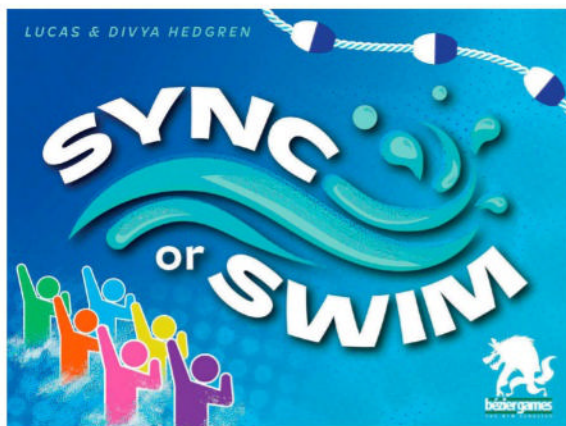
Designer: Lucas Hedgren & Divya Hedgren | Publisher: Bézier Games

Moisturized. Happy. In My Lane. Need Cards. Panicking.

Work together to complete an increasingly complex swimming routine in this Co-op real-time card game. Supposedly a game about the precise art of synchronised swimming, *Sync or Swim* is a chaotic scramble to play the right cards within the time limit. While you can plan as much as you like, you can’t actually look at your cards til the time begins and the ‘performance’ starts. Then it’s a game of quickly assessing your cards, communicating what you have and what you need. Players can freely communicate and exchange cards but they can’t be revealed to the table until the end of the performance and you check to make sure they match what’s required from the routine.

As your group becomes more familiar with what’s needed, each performance begins to follow a similar

arc. Like tracks for a train, you’ll lay out your plan, agreeing who might play what or in what order everyone should tackle the routine. You’ll start the timer and everyone will race along until inevitably, like this metaphor, the wheels fall off. Frantic trades are made, cards are discarded and new

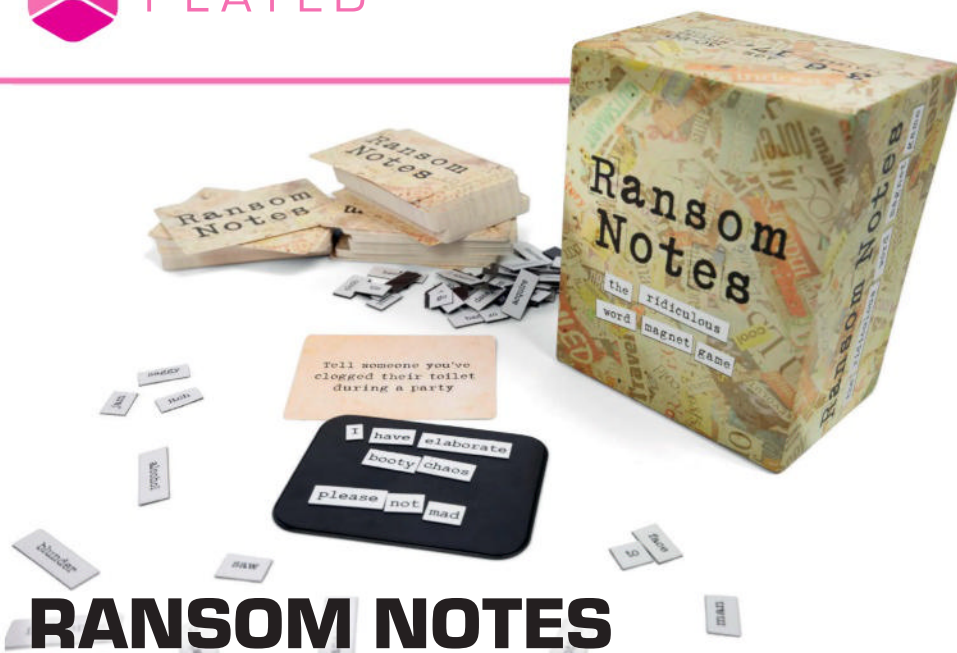


ones are drawn in the hopes of finding the last few cards required. There’s a neat wrinkle as discarded cards become inaccessible so one player might unknowingly discard a card needed by someone else, putting the team in an unwinnable situation.

If co-op games are your thing and you can get this to the table with five or six players you’ll be in for a good time. It’s unfortunate that the theme fits the game like a baggy verruca sock and the art style looks like the leisure center intern cooked it up with clip-art on word. But when you finally crack the routine you’ve been stuck on for five attempts you’ll feel like you’ve never been more deserving of smarties from the pool vending machine. Don’t be put off by the bland theme and packaging, there’s an enjoyable test of planning and improvisation hidden in this box. ●

GEORGE BARKER

PLAY IT? YES



RANSOM NOTES

Magnetic poetry against humanity

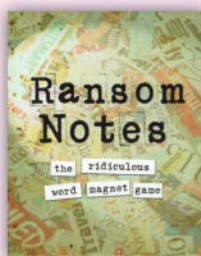
Designer: Evan Katz, Josh Roberts | **Publisher:** Evan and Josh's Very Special Games Company

How does one invent funny? Whilst AI software becomes scarily capable of not only performing manufacturing tasks but also “generating” visual art and music, there’s still no effective algorithm for generating jokes, much less funny ones. Being able to craft a game that not only meets the demands of the competitive tabletop marketplace by being fun, but taking that one step further by giving players the tools needed so that they can be funny, is a hell of a Herculean task.

Thank god *Ransom Notes* makes it look so easy.

A nonsensical giggling inducing party game for 3-6 players (or more if you can provide your own magnet surfaces), *Ransom Notes* is a comedy game in the vein of *Apples to Apples* where everyone selects from a personal, randomised assortment of magnet words to respond to prompts. Everyone submits an answer before a judge is randomly chosen, who picks one of anyone else’s submissions to gain a point, play until your point need is satisfied.

Immediately, the comedy potential welcomes you with open arms, as you gaze out at your array of nouns, adjectives and connectives. The wide vocabulary ensures a good balance of fun and functional, as for every “not” and “of” there’s a “virtue,” “explosion”



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 6 Metal submission plates
- ▶ 840 Magnet words
- ▶ 255 Prompt cards

Cards Against Humanity

A party game for horrible people.

or “dump.” They even made sure to add suffixes like “ed” and “ing” to further expand your options, alongside question and exclamation marks!

Of course, without suitably silly prompts to engage your hitherto unknown comedic talents, this is simply a box of cool fridge decorations. Thankfully, *Ransom Notes* delivers over 250 cards that gently shove you on the right path:

“Explain to a child how giving birth works.”

“What is the hardest part of being a ghost?”

“Summarise Greek Mythology.”

I didn’t have to dig for my favourite cards either, those are literally the top three off the deck and they are fantastic.

You’ve no doubt noticed at this point that a considerable amount of this review is me telling you the game’s contents and frankly, that’s kind of the point. If your gaming group needs more gameplay to structure their evenings, this isn’t for you. Likewise, whilst you could painstakingly pick through every card and magnet, removing stray “poop”

or more adult themed content, it’s probably safer to not bring this out for family gatherings when little ones are at the table.

This is the ‘get the drinks in and laugh yourselves hoarse’ kind of game, one you bring out to obliterate social ice instead of merely breaking it, or when your friends are too tired to settle down to anything remotely involving dice rolls and card plays. So many other games exist capitalising on the “shock humour lol” craze that was twisted into existence by *Cards Against Humanity*, many of which are shallow imitations to a game I personally no longer take any pleasure in.

Ransom Notes understands how crucial ownership of your joke is.



Anyone can slam down an offensive card and cause a titter of nervous laughter as everyone reacts in mild shock to the audacity of what was printed (or then read aloud.) But by giving you just that little bit of creative control, even when every round will see you unable to get the exact phrase you wanted to create, the game elevates its premise in much the same way other titles like *Funemployed* or *Monikers* gave players the tools needed to chisel away the crude jokes to craft something that, whilst often not perfect, still provides better laughs and most crucially, a sense of pride in a joke well made.

In summary: (If possible just include the below picture after “in summary, otherwise here is the text: “some not down with laugh craft game but if you relish it then nice buy”)

MATTHEW VERNALL

PLAY IT? YES

A comedy party game that gets you right in the mix, finding the right balance of creative input but limited decisions. Would definitely advise only playing with fun-loving adults though.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED: THAT OTHER GAME (A.K.A. CARDS AGAINST HUMANITY)

If you’ve laughed at your fair share of black and white cards, *Ransom Notes* shows how a little more creative control dramatically makes this system funnier and more enjoyable.



CATSTRONAUTS

In space no-one can hear you 'squeeeeeeee'

Designer: Simon Milburn & Caezar Al-Jassar | **Publisher:** Alley Cat Games



Let's get one thing out of the way before anything else. *Catstronauts* is cute. Like, weapons grade cute. From the customisable catstronauts themselves, to the tiny kitten meeples, this is the equivalent of a cat giving you those big, loveable eyes while they purr for more treats. However, is there any depth beyond the sweet little kitties?

Well, the easy answer is 'no, not really' but the more difficult answer is a bit longer... which is a good job because I've got a word count to fill. *Catstronauts* is an incredibly easy to play reaction game that can be taught in seconds. You start by choosing your four catstronauts, which are numbered one to four (more on that in a moment). These are beautifully made wooden cat meeples, complete with some high-quality printed graphics. When you first open the box, you can customise the cats by sticking on different facial expressions to give them that extra cute factor. Normally I hate stickers – because my big sausage fingers screw them up – but there was something extremely satisfying about choosing the expressions and then (very carefully) sticking them down. From the off, *Catstronauts* is on the charm offensive.

Once you've chosen your explorers, it's time to head into space to save some little kittens. Unfortunately, it isn't really explained why the kittens have been lost in space, or why you're racing to rescue them before the other teams of catstronauts. But look... cute kitties!

To save the kittens you flip over a mission card, before racing to place your numbered catstronauts on the correct planet card in the correct order. The order is determined by the position of the planet on the mission card and the number on the back of

the catstronauts. So, the number one catstronaut must be placed on the first planet, the number two catstronaut on the second planet... and so on, until you've placed all four. Because it's a race to place your four cats before anyone else, the pace is frenetic while you scramble around to find the correct numbered cat in your hand, before hammering it down on the planet. You will 100% need house rules about

is also adapted to include the black hole, moon and UFO cards and each addition means it's just that bit harder to spot the four you need to land on.

This ramping up of the difficulty is a neat way to introduce new players to the rules. However, *Catstronauts* is most definitely at its best once all seven cards are in play because you're more prone to mistakes, so the pressure increases. If you manage to overcome your clumsiness – and don't launch the catstronauts into

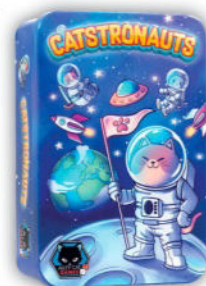


the void of space – then the game ends when someone rescues four kittens.

Catstronauts' cute factor definitely does a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of overall appeal. You'll struggle to find a kid (or adult, for that matter) who doesn't like the charming playing pieces, while the lightning-fast play time ensures no one gets bored. It's probably not a game you'll come back to time-and-time again in one sitting. However, the pickup and play rules combined with the almost non-existent set-up time mean this is a fun party game that's purr-fect as a very light-hearted filler. ●

ROB BURMAN

PLAY IT? YES



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 16 Catstronauts
- ▶ 13 Kittens
- ▶ 32 Stickers
- ▶ 7 Location cards
- ▶ 13 Home mission cards
- ▶ 4 Black hole Mission cards
- ▶ 4 Moon mission cards
- ▶ 4 UFO mission cards

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED COBRA PAW

Both feature cats, quick reaction-based gameplay and high-end components.





HELLBOY: THE DICE GAME

Red Means Stop!... or roll again, possibly

Designer: Rob Burman & Matt Gilbert | Publisher: Mantic Games



Before I can really explore this game, it's probably best to explain a little of the theme of Hellboy. Many of us have seen the comics and the films, but for the uninitiated, in the world of Hellboy, the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense is an international agency that sends investigators into unworldly situations to gather clues. When things get too tough, and an operative bites off more than they can chew, the B.P.R.D. can revive them, and send them on another mission.

Hellboy: The Dice Game is a competitive push-your-luck dice game built around the theme of these investigative forays. Each player, on their turn, draws a card, then rolls a blue special die with as many of the variously coloured attack dice as they wish. The aim of the dice roll is to



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 40 Exploration cards
- ▶ 3 Red plastic wound cubes
- ▶ 6 Yellow attack dice
- ▶ 3 Orange attack dice
- ▶ 2 Red attack dice
- ▶ Black attack die
- ▶ Blue special die
- ▶ Dice game bag
- ▶ Rules sheet



match or exceed the number of Frog Monster icons on the revealed card. Beat it, and keep the card and its clue points. Get beaten, lose a wound. Lose all your wounds and all your accumulated clue points are lost.

Seems almost childishly simple, so far, right? The twist is that each of the attack dice have different amounts of pips. Yellow dice, at best, can give you one point, orange two, and red, occasionally, three. The black dice is covered in cross-shaped pips, scoring a maximum roll of four. So, you need to beat three Frog Monsters? Do you roll three yellow dice? Just the black one? All your remaining oranges? The black dice scores, on average, 2.5

piPs, whereas the yellow score just 0.5. But luck, tricky beast that it is, means that the one time you rely on black to deliver, it'll just give you one pip and the Frog Monsters will destroy you.

Every dice you use is passed left to the next player, meaning your pool of dice rapidly shrinks, and worse; every good dice you choose is sent straight to your opponents to equip them to score well. The decision of how many dice to roll, and when to stop rolling and bank your clue points is not one that's possible to completely master; watching others miss the mark is extremely satisfying, especially since they are handing you their dice as they do it!

One friend commented to me that he'd had a lot of fun, and that this is rather neatly designed game, but that if I'd asked him if he wanted to play "Hellboy: The Dice Game" he'd have said no, because he had no knowledge of the franchise, and he'd assumed it would be bloody or violent.

The illustration here is splashy cartoon noir, as you would expect from any creative work linked to *Hellboy's* artist Mike Mignolai. There is maybe a touch of repetition on the cards, although the investigative setting, with its constant hunt for just one more clue, means you don't spend much time focusing on them anyway. It's all about the results on the dice!

There's no denying that the push-your-luck mechanics here would work equally well in a lightly themed abstract setting too - and perhaps that would open this surprisingly feisty little puzzle to a wider audience. For lovers of Hellboy though, this is a rather rewarding, practically mandatory purchase. ●

CHRIS LOWRY

PLAY IT? YES

Surprisingly more-ish, this game gives to everyone else as it takes away from you. The satisfaction of out-rolling your mates with the same dice they gave you? Fabulous.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED KING OF TOKYO

...There are no giant monsters here (apart from Hellboy himself) but the chunky custom dice and the take-that vs style play will have cross appeal.



DULCE

A bittersweet experience

Designer: Julio E. Nazario | Publisher: Stronghold Games



In *Dulce* the irresistible sweetness of the confectionery theme mixes with the puzzle and resource management mechanics to re-enact the process of making sweets. In the game, players compete to earn the most victory points by delivering the right type of ingredients to the local cafes. They will need to plant cacao, coffee, peanut, and vanilla seeds, harvest them and deliver to the cafes, trying to use every by-product of the manufacturing process to its full potential and avoid unnecessary wastage.

While sweets themselves can be considered an exuberance, *Dulce* is a minimalist game. Its box has a slick stylish artwork that doesn't give much away but sets the expectations high. The game itself consists of only a few multi-functional components. The player board is used for planting fields and has two sets of score tracks. One is for the victory points, while the other tracks chicken points, which players can redeem during the game to get eggs, cubes which can

be used as any resource. The cards are also multi-use. One side shows the field and what type of beans can be grown on it, while the other side represents the café. Players can also discard a card to perform the harvest action – transfer beans from the field onto their respective places on the café cards. Finally, each bean is a small cube in a pleasing pastel colour (although, depending on the lighting, they can be hard to tell apart).

At the start of every round, the first player draws a card from their deck and everyone else around the table finds the same one in their decks, then all perform actions using that card. The card may be the same for everyone, but due to its multi-use, every player will end up doing something different with it. Some might decide to build up their fields, while others will be keen to get some points in early by placing down cafes. This multifunctionality, however, also has its downsides. Every choice on the card feels so equally balanced that it rarely sways players' decisions. If

they decide to harvest this turn, it is unlikely that any field or café layout will change their minds.

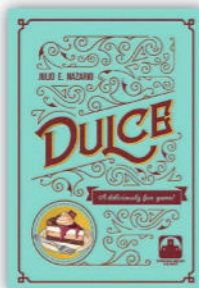
There is also some light engine-building in the game as every bean can have up to three uses. If the player manages to get cafes that use all stages of the bean, they can score three times using the same cube! Efficiency and zero wastage pay off!

Deciding which side of the card to use, when to harvest and how to set up a production chain is an interesting puzzle to solve, and *Dulce* does it well. Except, whether you are solving it by yourself or with other people around the table makes absolutely no difference. Except for shouting the number of the card at the start of the round, players have no interaction with each other. There is no point in looking at how someone else is doing because you can't do anything about it! Players can't have negative or positive interactions with each other's boards. This creates a silent, concentrated atmosphere around the table, only interrupted by the shouting of the number. Otherwise, players have very little to say to each other. Furthermore, as some actions take longer to execute than others, for example, planting fields is fast, but scoring can take a while, especially for a player with many cafes. Therefore, turns can become frustratingly out of sync with some players waiting for others to complete all their tasks.

Dulce is beautiful and deliciously puzzly but succeeds only as a solo game. All its charm and cleverness turn sour in the multiplayer format, leaving the gaming table in a slightly awkward concentrated silence. **ALEXANDRA SONECHKINA**

PLAY IT? MAYBE

Dulce should have been a solo game! It is a great little puzzle game but having other players to either catch up to or wait for, without any gameplay interaction, brings the whole experience down.



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 4 Player boards
- ▶ 96 Double-sided cards
- ▶ 115 Resource cubes
- ▶ 4 Payer meeples
- ▶ 4 Chicken meeples
- ▶ 15 Eggs



TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED AZUL...

If you mastered building wall tile patterns in *Azul*, without dropping a single tile, then creating an efficient confectionary production chain in *Dulce* will be right up your alley!



QUICKITY PICKITY

Flipping fun

Designer: Mashii | Publisher: Oink Games



Quickity Pickity is a beguiling game. If I told you that it's a simple matter of flipping tokens and making matching sets, you'd assume it was a game for kids only. It might even be considered a good one when I say that you have marketplace cards so each round has a different kind of scoring. Or a particularly nice to look at one as that there's a little wooden stick to designate your area of the board (with no other discernible purpose).

But like the best games that Oink put out, *Quickity Pickity* really reaches into your brain and turns on the whisking function. All at once players flip over tokens in the centre of the table, hoping to make matching sets that will please the market. Each market card for the round will show players that they'll get a certain number of points for certain set sizes – and even minus points for some. In one round, creating a set of two fruit might mean three points, in the next it might mean minus two.

The matching is also a little devious – you can match colour or shape in a set as long as they also all match the same fruit attitude. Yes, you read that right, is it a happy fruit or grumpy fruit? If you add a grumpy fruit to your happy fruit set you've just made

that illegitimate (because of the fruit vibes?) and you'll get points deducted for that round.

While I'm a famously anti-squinting in games (sorry *Micro Macro*), but here the very easily misread smiley face and sad faces on the fruit is part of the brain-whisking sensation that I love. Players can't edit or change their sets once they've been placed, so once you've committed to a fruit vibe, you're stuck with it. And it's easily spoiled. This creates a kind of stalling-sprint around the board as you hunt and pick for tiles that work for you while trying to be careful not to ruin what you've already built. As you can expect, while this is very much a family friendly game, ruining a hard-built set of sad fruit with one happy one makes for a few choice exclamations around the table.

Oh, and the stick. It's an Oink game, so there's always going to be something a little bit needlessly nice. In this case it's not only the pre-punched tokens with lovely (and tricky-to-distinguish-in-a-fun-way) fruit designs, it's also the

green wooden stick that you use for separating your area from that of the board. It may be very helpful for younger players, but for the rest of us, it's just a really nice touch of quality.

To make the game easier for younger players, the instructions suggest letting them ignore the 'fruit vibes' and instead focus on shape and colour sets. This works, but for players younger than the recommended age (for example a three year old on your lap) they can simply shout 'monkey' whenever they see someone turn one over on the board. Once the third monkey is flipped, the round is over and the scoring starts. This variable timer is nipping at your heels as soon as everyone gets flipping, and it's the thing that drives you to make terrible fruity mistakes. ●

CHRISTOPHER JOHN EGGETT



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 67 Cardboard fruit tokens
- ▶ 5 Wooden stick dividers
- ▶ 16 Marketplace cards

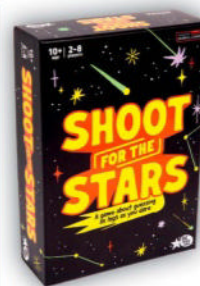
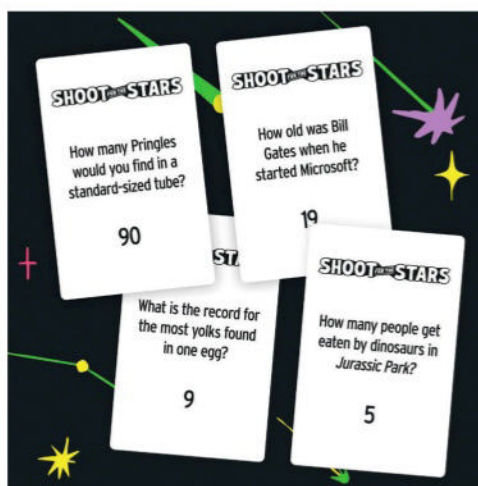
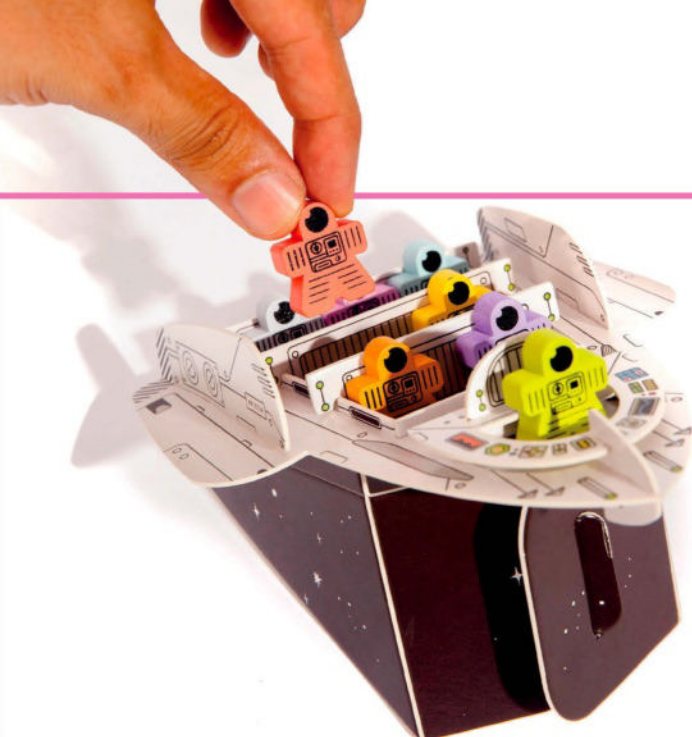


TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED PIT...

The shouty trading game shares some of the frenetic energy with *Quickity Pickity*, although the latter doesn't *have* to have shouting involved.

PLAY IT? YES

It's great all-ages fun with a little brain-melting twist to keep things interesting. If you're looking for a healthy snack, we cannot recommend this fruit salad highly enough.



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 200 question cards
- ▶ 8 Character chips
- ▶ 8 Astronaut meeples
- ▶ 50 Star coins
- ▶ Punch board ship
- ▶ Playing board

SHOOT FOR THE STARS

Guess the best, but don't outpace the rest

Designer: Darrell Cannon | Publisher: Big Potato Games



Being right is a powerful skill, and one that my (tediously opinionated) family excels at. The problem being, when you get five know-it-alls in a room, that only one person can be right. Sometimes not even that many.

Shoot for the Stars is a party game, aimed at any group that enjoys guessing stuff. It comes with some chunky, absolutely beautiful illustrated meeples and a delightful cardboard spaceship and planet board. Sam Ailey's artwork on *What Next* was wonderful too, and the thick-lined cartoons here remind me of Steven Tu's high contrast designs in *Factory Funnier*.

Each round involves a player turning over a card and reading the question; sample "How old was Stephen Hawking when he died?". That player makes a guess, and becomes the Captain, sitting their meeple in the Captain's Seat at the front of the ship. Players take turns to accept this number, and stay in the crew, shout out a higher number, becoming the new Captain, or abandon ship if they think the guess has gone stratospheric.

The round ends once a player starts their turn in the Captain's Seat, meaning there had been no

challengers since their last turn. At that point the truth is revealed, and star coins are rewarded. If the final guess is spot-on, or beneath the correct answer, everyone left in the ship gets coins, with the lion's share going to the Captain. However, if the guess missed the mark, the Captain pays a penalty, and everyone who abandoned ship gets two star coins. After eight questions, whoever has the most coins wins.

It's a simple enough recipe, one that leads to light-hearted success. No-one can ever go lower than a previous answer, meaning the temptation to push higher is always there. It's amazing how malleable a factual answer can appear in the moment of deliberation; "Hmm, *maybe* he was older than 60? 66 *seems* plausible..."

The moment when someone pushes too hard, and everyone wholeheartedly abandons ship is brilliant, the over-optimistic Captain trying to persuade others to "go on, have a go, I'm sure he was older than 90!". To no avail. Even then, reality can be strange, and more than once we've seen an obviously wrong Captain walk away with a hefty reward in star coins for being the only correct guesser left on the ship.

Obvious caveats are that the cards from this British game are written for

a predominantly Western audience. Middle-Eastern gamers may not know much about the quantity of grandchildren the (now-deceased) Queen of England had, for example. Also, a hundred double-sided cards gives a decent amount of variability for casual play, but regular returners to the game would find some of the facts familiar very quickly. To the right group, of course, that's not a problem, but one that adds an additional competitive element of memorising 200 obscure numbers, and inevitably, confidently mis-remembering them.

Still, it's exactly what it seems like on the tin, and opens the field from obsessive pub quiz winning types to incorporate any have-a-game hero. Being able to play the odds by supporting a Captain and winning coins on the coat tails of their success is an excellent touch, one that brings a level of gaming strategy to a genre more usually reliant on perfect numeric recollection. ●

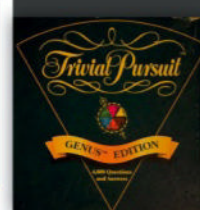
CHRIS LOWRY

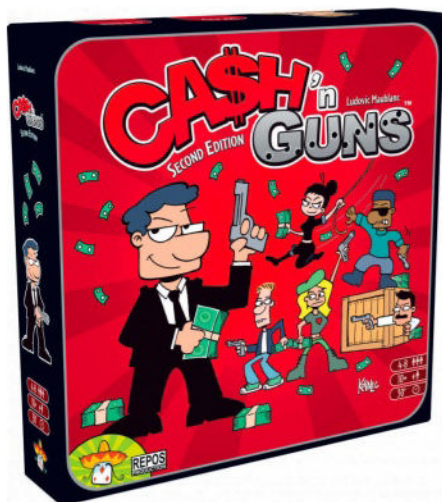
PLAY IT? YES

A fun little party game, perfect for filling between courses at dinner, or relaxed rounds in the pub. Not something you'd want to play daily though.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED TRIVIAL PURSUIT

...I hate *Trivial Pursuit*, but *Shoot For The Stars* has a cool spaceship instead, and only lasts for 8 questions, a much more enjoyable length.





CASH 'N GUNS

Join us as we recount how games actually feel when they're being played

Words by **Chris Lowry**

THE FATEFUL FINISH OF A FAMILY FIELDING FAKE FIREARMS

A single drop of perspiration rolled down my cheek.

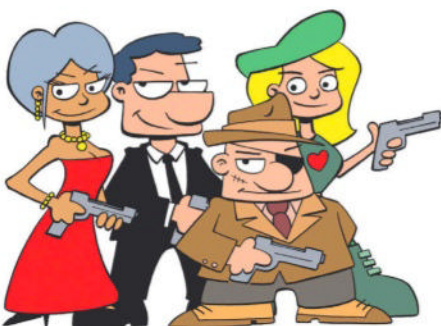
In retrospect, the Lowry family's relentless descent into crime probably began when we first played *Burgle Bros.* That tight puzzle of security guards and safe-cracking gave us a taste for the darker side of the law.

A taste that led me here. Facing down the blank barrel of a polystyrene gun, pointed in my direction by a nine year old girl. A girl with the ruthless eyes of someone simply *itching* to pull the trigger.

Our game of *Ca\$h 'N Guns*, began, as many do, with five friendly humans ready for a good time. The basic structure of play is simple: loot cards are laid on the table each round, and each player decides who they are going to shoot. On a count of "One, Two, Three!", everyone levels their gun at another player. The dust settles on the unfolding Mexican standoff, and everyone is given a chance to stand down with another countdown of "One, Two, Three!". Anyone aimed at and still standing is shot... unless their opponents were armed with a "Blank" bullet. Loot is split between each of the surviving players, and the next round commences.

Simple enough, but the bitterness and broken promises begin almost immediately. During our first round, the entire family decided to point their guns at me. Horrified by the betrayal, I put my hands up, and the ill-gotten goods were shared between the rest of my loved ones. But rather than feeling satisfied, each began to wrestle with mistrust; what if their co-conspirators became as greedy as they themselves had been?!

It all changed then. Beady eyes tried to assess whom, round the table, was hoarding the most wealth. During the next few moments



of play, several people got shot. Isaac, six years old, took his assault with good grace, gleefully pointing his gun at his assailant for every future round, the prejudicial foundations laid for a lifelong grudge.

My wife Katherine was "The Godfather" for much of the game, able to choose loot first, with the game-changing ability of being able to shift a single player's gun during the stand-off. She maintained her fragile grasp on power by playing people against each other; "I'm sure Daddy picked up more diamonds than Joen last turn..." For a time this worked well for her, but her comeuppance was inevitable - the pile of plunder in front of her too large to hide. Standing firm against her aggressors - motivated more by stubbornness than strategy - she was wounded twice, ending her reign, and her player's life.

By the final turn, boldness - and luck - led to my daughter Neriah and I commanding a lead. My wife was dead, and my sons were distracted by the back-and-forth of petty revenge. Victory lay before just two of us.

Eleven year old Joen was the Godfather. Calmly, he began to count. "One..."

I looked around the room. Joen and Isaac were glaring at each other. Their enmity - and

mutual destruction - seemed assured. Isaac stuck his tongue out. Joen frowned further. They would aim at each other.

"Two..."

My daughter was holding her gun, ready. And grinning. That wily fox was going for me, I was sure of it.

"Three!"

I swung my gun up, pointing at the nine year old, aiming right back at me. The boys' petty squabbling had been predictable - they targeted one another - but I had forgotten that Joen was *The Godfather*!

"Isaac, point your gun at Daddy".

Two guns in my direction! Now, the six year old had been, unsurprisingly, reckless with his ammunition - I was confident he would be firing a blank. But the nine year old? I glanced at Neriah. A sardonic smirk lay on her lips.

"Feeling scared, Daddy?"

"Anyone standing down? One..."

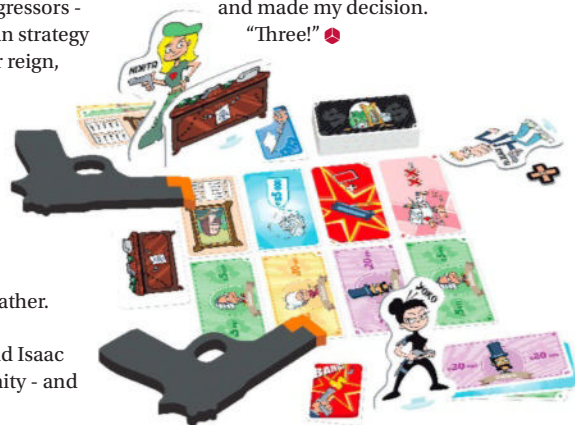
I gulped. Did I raise my hands, and lose my portion of the proceeds, or did I stay, and risk a final finishing blow?

"Two..."

The sweat beaded on my forehead.

I looked into Neriah's cold, murderous glare and made my decision.

"Three!" 🎯



GOVERN. TRADE. CONSPIRE. CONQUER.

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS®

THE PRICE OF POWER

FEATURES:

- Epic Grand Strategy
- Full 4X experience
- Low player down time
- Assymetric factions
- Multiple scenarios incl. Grand Campaign
- Modular play time



Players:
1-4 / 1-6



Minutes:
90+



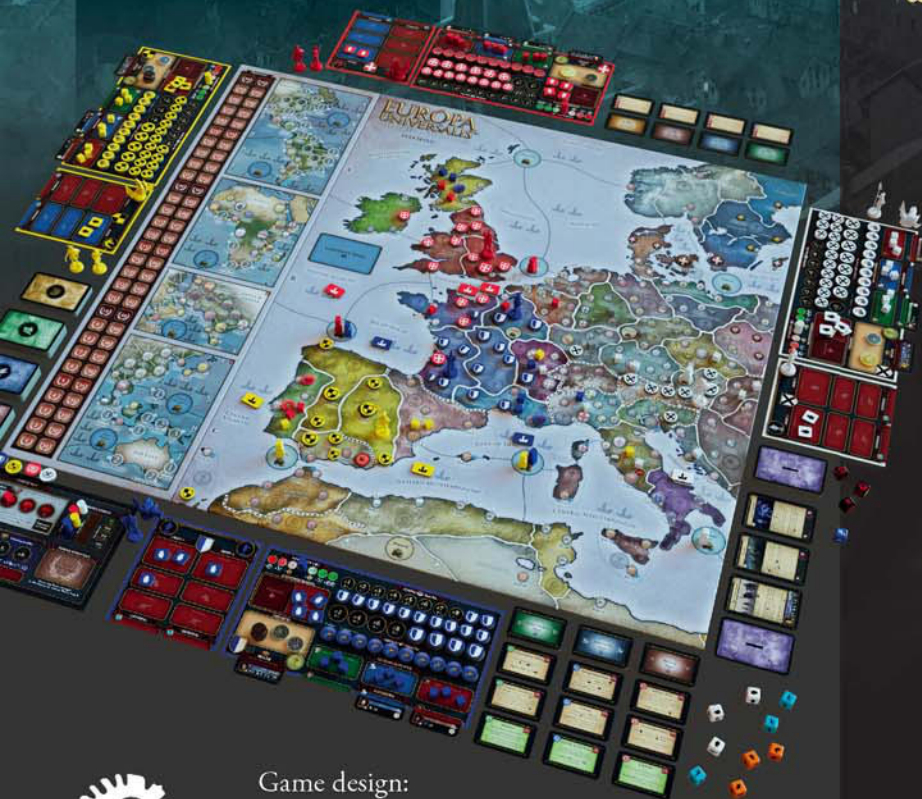
Age:
14+



Limited-time Bundle!

Standard Edition + Fate of Empires
With all gameplay content!

aegirgames.com/shop



Game design:
Eivind Vetlesen

Solo mode:
Dávid Turczi

(Standard Edition)

(Fate of Empires Expansion)



Aegir Games

RETURN TO

In a hobby focused on playing games a handful of times before moving on, we investigate

So much of this hobby is rushing about. We're always looking for the next big thing, the next mechanical buzz that's going to send our brains fizzing like a too-large Catherine wheel in a too-small garden. We want that feeling during play – and beyond – if it's really good. In fact, I might say that we all as hobby gamers have this tension in our heads where we're at once looking for the *new thing* and also looking for the game that's going to live in our heads when we're not playing it. Some might say *Dungeons & Dragons* is a sub-hobby of the actual hobby of thinking about your next session, your character, or if you're the GM, the next big problem you want to reverse park in front of your players. Trading card games do the same, if you're thinking about your next Friday Night Magic session, you're probably also thinking about constructing that perfect deck that's going to leave your opponents smashed to bits.

But in the hobby board game space, we move on quickly. Those that are designated 'classics' on some way, those games that are an important part of the 'canon' are relegated to being 'gateway' games. *Pandemic*? *Catan*? *Carcassonne*? Games you 'move on' from in the most part if you're a 'serious' gamer. You're looking for complexity and depth. Maybe a story. We're never quite satisfied either.

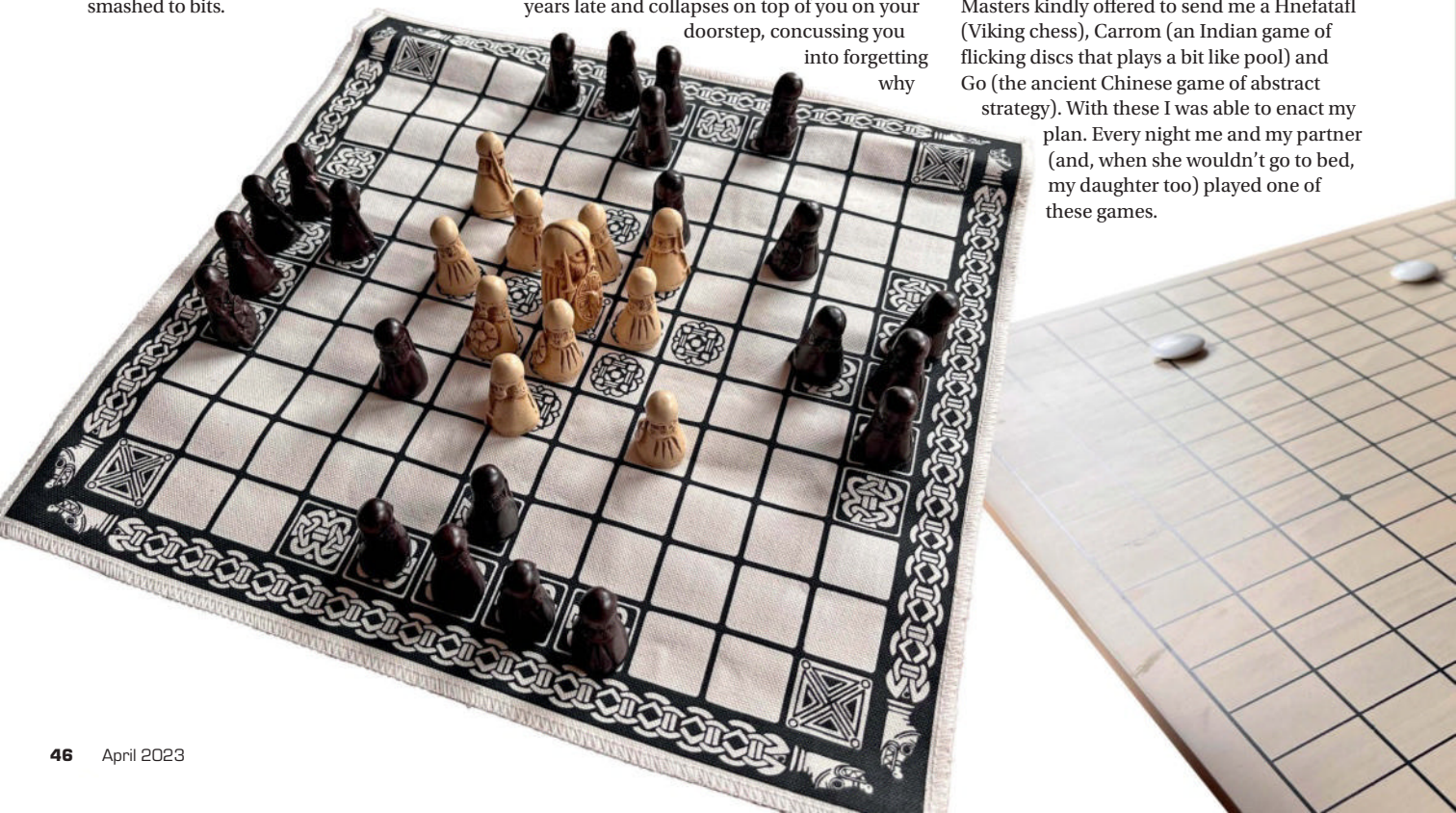
So, to cure this feeling, I set about on a quest. How do we reset our expectations for playing games more than a handful of times before trading them in on the second hand market? How do we build a new relationship with games that feel like they live with us, in our normal lives, and not just unfolded on to a table of a game's evening like a delicious but wonky pizza that's calzoned itself on its bumpy journey? We're looking for a hobby that's nourishing through familiarity and consistency, not as a Kickstarter arrives two years late and collapses on top of you on your doorstep, concussing you into forgetting why

you were excited in the first place. I decided it was time to return to some traditional games and explore their depth and compatibility with my life.

THE LIFESTYLE GAME

I wanted to play the same game or games every night. And that means that I couldn't be boxing and unboxing 400 components tokens, legacy map and miniatures every day. They have to be nice enough objects to be displayed. They have to be easily located, quickly set up. I've often spoken of the Gigamic wooden games being something special for their 'being an interesting art piece on the coffee table' effect when not being played.

I reached out to Masters of Games, a well-regarded purveyor of the classics. They're usually made from wood and have been around at least a bit longer than *Catan*. James Masters kindly offered to send me a Hnefatafl (Viking chess), Carrom (an Indian game of flicking discs that plays a bit like pool) and Go (the ancient Chinese game of abstract strategy). With these I was able to enact my plan. Every night me and my partner (and, when she wouldn't go to bed, my daughter too) played one of these games.



TRADITION

what it's like to 'live' with traditional games Words by **Christopher John Eggett**

Living with these games like this meant a couple of things. We were learning together, which isn't unusual for a hobby game night, but there's no expectation that you're going to be comparably good at a game after understanding a teach here. And the other is that we became more obsessed with the depth of each game.

Carrom is a sport really. Players sit on opposite sides of the square board and flick a striker piece towards a bunch of discs in the centre of the board, hoping to pocket their colour. I say hoping because we never got very good at it. The times I lugged it to an evening where the drinks were flowing, tournaments broke out immediately. It's a naturally competitive game and for anyone who has played any 'bar sports' before, it will click with you quickly. Also, you're always going to have to put down more Carrom powder than you expect.

Hnefatafl is a game of attack and defence. With a chess-like feel – you're moving pieces around a grid after all. The defending player starts in the centre and needs to move their king to one of the escape spaces in the

corners of the board to win. Predictably, the attacking player needs to capture the king to win. Movement is case of traveling in any orthogonal direction (i.e. no diagonals) as far as you wish, and capturing is the amusing art of sandwiching your opponent's pieces between two of yours. You can also sandwich with the escape spaces or the king's start space – and to capture the king you'll need to totally surround it. All of this leads to an interesting puzzle of space and placement, and does really feel like a companion to chess.

But it was Go that captured me particularly. In fact it made me wonder why we play a lot of the games we do when we could simply be playing go instead. We sat down to speak with James Masters, the owner of Masters of Games about how these traditional games work their ways into our lives, and our brains. ▣



LIVING WITH TRADITIONAL GAMES



Hello! Can you introduce yourself to our readers please?

James Masters: I'm the creator and owner of Masters Traditional Games! I also moonlight as an

independent games historian.

And what does Masters Traditional Games do?

JM: We sell the kind of games that I like to play – games that have been around for centuries – or at least consistently popular for a decade or so... Our portfolio of games is wide and deep and we specialise in games that most other shops just don't have. A brief glance at our website and you will

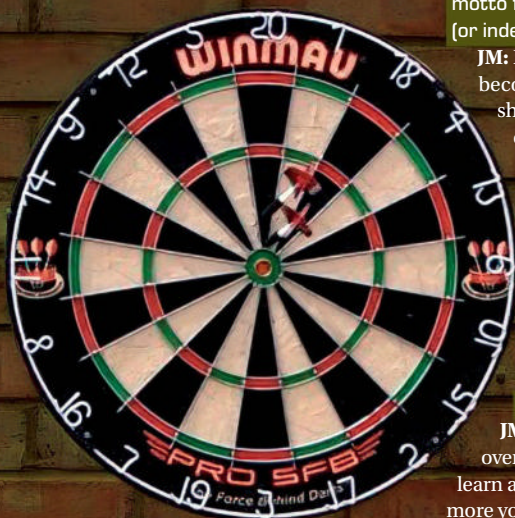
see everything from high quality snooker tables to an eight by eight Rubiks cube, from Croquet to a Coconut Shy, from Giant Chess sets to Mah Jong, from Skittles to Spinning Tops and from Jenga to Risk. Our specialisms include obscure English pub games, oriental board games, historical board games and classic table-top games from places such as Canada, Holland, France and India but we also sell all the popular games like Backgammon, Table Tennis, Darts and Scrabble.

What we don't do is licenced or faddy stuff. You won't find the transient modern games that come and go within two years, the Transformers version of Monopoly or Tellytubbies Junior Scrabble. We sell many modern games but we carefully pick out all the best ones for our customers – recent classics and those that have won the 'Game of the Year' awards.

How did you get started? What was it that brought you into the world of traditional games?

JM: I've been interested in games and collecting them from a very early age. I was playing old board games and reading books on medieval table games before I was ten and the fascination has never gone away. In 1997, I decided that if you really wanted to learn about something, you needed to write about it so I wrote a website about the history of traditional games (tradgames.org.uk) which is still maintained to this day. As soon as that was out there, people started to email me asking where they could get hold of some of these old games. That made me think that, in this time of video games and less socialising in pubs, there was a need for a shop to ensure that all these games continue to be available for the world to play. I started by selling six traditional English pub games in 1999 but of





course now we sell almost every game you can think of and a lot that you've probably never heard of too – but they're all good fun!

If you had a manifesto, mission statement or motto for the business – what would it be? (or indeed, what is it, if you have one?)

JM: My goal was pretty straightforward – to become the world's best traditional games shop. At this point in time, I don't know of a better games shop but let me know if you do and we'll see what we can do to get even better.

We're talking in large part about Go in this article – and how traditional games like these feel like a 'lifestyle' compared to the hobby market (i.e. *Catan*). Do you have a theory as to why these games endure?

JM: Yes, games like these are successful over centuries because they are easy to learn and yet continue to be challenging, the more you play. I love the modern games that have emerged since the turn of the century such as *Carcassonne*, *Catan*, *Pandemic* and even the more complex ones like *Terraforming Mars* but I suspect that if we haven't destroyed the planet in 200 years time, people will still be playing Go and Carrom but probably not *Terraforming Mars*. If it takes more than 5 or 6 minutes to explain how to play a game, it's difficult for it to gather enough traction to endure and it will eventually be eclipsed by other more fashionable games. Even Chess, that people tend to think of as complicated, can be wholly explained in under five minutes.

We've been playing Go nearly every night for the last few months, and it's a completely different experience to playing the hobby games for a 'games night' – like it doesn't interrupt the normal domestic 'headspace' or something. Do you have any thoughts on the way these games wiggle into people's lives like this?

JM: Games nights are terrific and I thoroughly enjoy them. But they need to be arranged in advance and have some time dedicated to them. If I'm ever at a loose hanging around ▶

LIVING WITH TRADITIONAL GAMES



in the house with my son or a friend, what do we do? We reach for the Chess board or the Crokinole board. They're just always there, you can pick them up without planning, we know it will take less than an hour (actually usually less than twenty minutes these days for son to destroy me at Chess). Go and Carrom are the same – probably millions of Indian houses have a Carrom board hanging up somewhere and Go, well Go is something really special. How can a game that has only three rules be the most complex and sublime board game in existence? People dedicate their whole lives to it and then also people play it at home in half an hour on a nine by nine board. So the point really is that such games are easy to pick-up and easy to play and you socialise while you're playing them, without even really thinking about it.

Do you find yourself to live a life of these traditional style games? Do you play them often, or are you into something else?

JM: I play games of many types whenever I can, yes. Depending on my current favourite games and who I'm with, I'm always asking people if they'd like a game of Skittles, Go, Chess, all sorts of modern games, Snooker or Croquet. I have regular modern board game nights with friends, am a member of the Hampstead Lawn Billiards and Skittles club (although haven't been since Covid unfortunately), get down to the local Snooker club when I can and occasionally enter a Crokinole competition.

Any advice for people wanting to explore this gaming space who have come from hobby gaming?

You could do worse than start with the two games you selected. A plunge into historical

board games can also be a rewarding experience. Try playing the Royal Game of Ur and imagine that 4000 years ago, people were playing the same game. And then, since no-one really knows how the game was played exactly, see if you can come up with your own rules. I recommend royalur.net to get you started... If that wets your whistle, Hnefatafl, the game of the Vikings Nine Mens Morris, one of the most popular games from medieval times or Senet, the classic Egyptian game that existed in 3000BC might also pique your interest.

What's your favourite game from your range?

There are too many to pick one out but I can come off the fence if I do it by category.

Pub game: Northamptonshire Skittles

Table Game: Snooker

Table-top game: Crokinole

Traditional Board Game: Go

Modern board game: Ticket to Ride

Modern abstract board game: Blokus

Ancient Game: Mehen

Gambling Game: Craps

Card Game: Cribbage

What's next for you and the business?

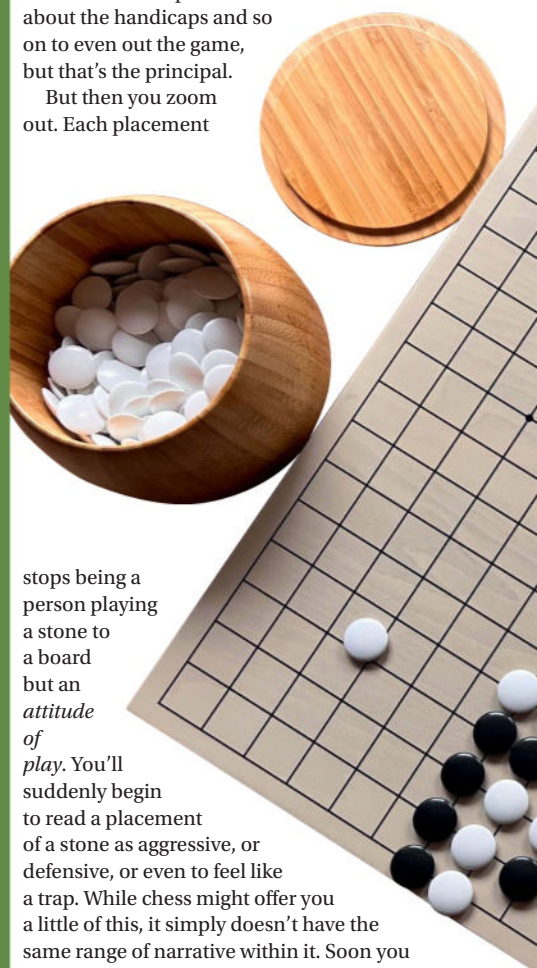
I keep my games research entirely separate from the business, but I'm currently finalising an academic paper that has been accepted by The Journal of Interdisciplinary Egyptology. It's about the ancient Egyptian game of Mehen and some remarkable archaeological finds that have been misinterpreted over the years. Mehen or the Serpent Game is probably the oldest board game in the world with evidence that goes back five and a half thousand years! I have another paper being reviewed by a different journal about how Mehen might have been played. At the same time, I am some way through the research for my next research project on the old game of Bagatelle. Everyone knows Pinball but what most people don't know is that Pinball is evolved from Bagatelle, a game that most European people's grandparent's certainly played and which in turn has its own ancestors – large table games that go back to before 1800. It's a fascinating historical story and again, a lot has been written about it that is not entirely true. I aim to put that right.

For the business, we're trying to up our game in digital marketing with various projects on the go and we'll be adding to our range of historical board games this year. I hope to bring back the medieval game of Pigeon Holes before long and we will be producing an updated third version of our Pin bagatelle board and second version of our Bar Skittles game.

DO NOT PASS GO

Out of everything we tried over these last few months, Go was the game that I became fixated on. For those that haven't played, it's simple on the surface. A board with a grid of points on it (19 by 19 at full size, nine by nine at its smallest), players take a stone of their colour – black or white – and place it on one of these points on their turn. Each gap around a stone is a liberty, and when they're all filled in by the opponent, that stone is captured. A group of stones connected to one another (diagonals don't count) are considered a group, and share all liberties. The player to have claimed the most territory at the end of the game – gaining a point for each open space they control on the board, plus a point for each stone captured – wins. There's rules about the handicaps and so on to even out the game, but that's the principal.

But then you zoom out. Each placement



stops being a person playing a stone to a board but an *attitude of play*. You'll suddenly begin to read a placement of a stone as aggressive, or defensive, or even to feel like a trap. While chess might offer you a little of this, it simply doesn't have the same range of narrative within it. Soon you start looking at the strong shapes to build and making calls on whether a territory is lost or owned. Your opponent will do the same – especially in our case as we learned how to

play and developed our own styles. Coming from a culture more familiar with chess the idea of taking pieces begins as a central idea, but that has to be chucked away quite quickly. Famously Go is the greatest game for man to have *discovered* – it also feels like that to play. You are discovering the spaces that can be gently pushed against, enveloped, or stolen.

And that's it – a whole new space of a game opens up before you, not like it does when a game 'clicks' in our hobby, but like seeing the ocean for the first time. There's a scope to this game that, yes, you could attribute to its history, but I truly believe it's baked into the game. It's timeless and as such is the ideal thing to slip into your life with the idea you might still be playing it in forty years.

What it gave us, throughout this experiment, is a way to connect in a game space where learning and understanding the rules isn't



one of the core requirements for fun. Instead it is something we learned together. While we're still rubbish, watching someone react to changes in your play style as you both become more adept is a great and fulfilling feeling.

So, with that, I'd like to offer everyone reading to take up this challenge. Take a game that you can let live in your living room and be picked up with a cup of coffee as easily as a biscuit, and make it available. You never know, you might learn to live with it.

Head over to mastersofgames.com to get your traditional game fix. 🌱

OUT OF THE BOX



NO RULE

Our round up of the good, the bad and the ugly of non-gaming, nearly-gaming, sort-of-gaming stuff

Words by **Christopher John Eggett**

ZOMBICIDE: ALL OR NOTHING, ACONYTE

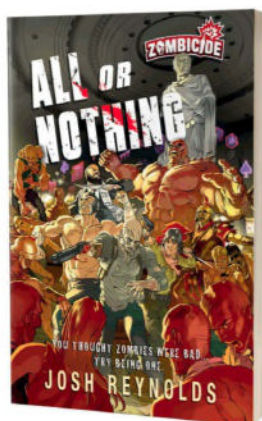
Another entry in the Aconyte series of novels in the world of tabletop gaming. In this case it's CMON's *Zombicide* that's had the treatment, and this one caught our eye because it's a bit twisted. What's worse than becoming a zombie? Okay, the real answer here is that your loved ones become zombies, but other than that? That's right, becoming a half-zombie who is aware of their undeadness. Our 'hero' Westlake is one to have unluckily rolled such a fate and is now at the centre of a plan to save the people of Atlantic City. It's a pulpy zombie romp that does exactly what it promises on the cover.

A great place to start with this series of board game novels.



£10

GET IT? YES

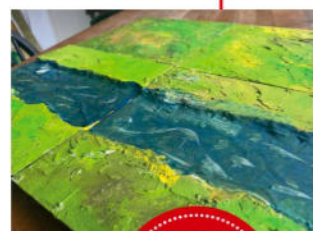


HELL IS OTHER ZOMBIES

TERRAIN TILES, ANOMALIA GAMES

When you make the leap, step, or stumble, into the world of miniature-based-wargaming you're going to spend loads of money on miniatures. And then paint, and then a rulebook or two, and then you're going to set everything up on your dining room table and realise that despite the perfect zenithal priming (don't worry about it, it's for paint nerds) you did on the models – the salt and pepper shakers and a box of cornflakes aren't the immersive terrain you wanted. Thus you need some sort of terrain. Maybe something... modular. Terrain Tiles come as boxes of MDF to smash together in a kind of outlet for all of your pent-up IKEA rage. They're massive durable and can be quickly converted into whatever terrain you want. We've supplied a picture of ours all set up (forgive the blue river, apparently, it's what colour a three year old needs water to be), which was a case of slapping some premixed plaster filler on to make a rough texture and then painting it. Imagine what could happen with your hobby talents?

The MDF flatpacks are very reasonably priced and include slopes, rivers, divots and all manner of configurations.



HAVE IT WAR WAY



£80

GET IT? YES

DUTY OVERNIGHT BAG, TEENAGE ENGINEERING

What is the best way to carry games around? One of those nerd back-packs that make you look like a Deliveroo rider? Something on wheels? Balanced on your head like they taught you at board game finishing school? Or, like me, a big Ikea bag because I really struggle to make choices about what to bring to a games night. All of those answers are now officially wrong. Instead, you should pick up one of these extremely fetching Duty Overnight bags from synthesizer-and-very-nice-toys maker Teenage Engineering. The bag is basically indestructible and waterproof, there's space for all your extras in the internal pockets, and it can be slung or carried in a variety of positions. It's designed for moving their very fancy speak systems around which, wouldn't you know it, is the perfect size for a single *Nemesis* or a couple of *Ticket To Ride* sized boxes on their side, or the entirety of the Oink and Helvetiq collections. A lifetime appointment to your gaming kit.



£79

GET IT? YES

IT'S MY BAG

S REQUIRED

RETRO ARCADE MACHINE, ORB

We've been sent some quite leftfield stuff since starting this feature. And this is one of them. A strangely high-production value toy arcade cabinet. It has two wireless controllers that slot in to the main body of this miniature machine. The screen is really nice and crisp. The sound is old school and occasionally extremely loud (as you'd expect from anything in this genre of toy-things). The games themselves aren't award winners. You're not playing Streetfighter II Turbo Championship Edition on this bad boy. Instead you're playing slightly janky old fashioned platformers, racing games and the odd bit of fighting. And yet... they're not bad at all. The fact that this is the machine most likely to see two-player digital gaming in my house probably is more of a comment on the state of games consoles demanding online play than anything else, but it's pretty good for a bit of nonsense competition. We were surprised at how much we've got out of this little unit, despite it's off-brand

games. Plus, it can plug into a TV or screen for even bigger little gaming. Worth a look.



£50

GET IT? YES

MICRO MACHINE



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CARTOON CLASSICS, HASBRO

GET ANIMATED

"Hey, look! A Dungeons & Dragons ride!" can be recalled at any time for gamers of a certain age. And in the extremely annoying voice of the child-barbarian (called Bobby) of the classic and slightly janky cartoon from the 80s. The cartoon is worth a revisit for its character and monster design but maybe not it's overall production. These charming recreations of the classic characters are a swift and deadly ransacking of your wallet in the name of nostalgia. Presented in a modern imagining of a classic action-figure-in-a-box (which screams 'don't open me, I might be worth a lot of money in 40 years time') the announced figures of Presto (wizard), Eric (paladin), and Sheila (rogue) look great. A nice touch is that each boxed character also comes with the appropriate hit dice for their class - meaning you could always

bundle these up with an appropriate starter set as a sweetener to get people into *Dungeon & Dragons*.

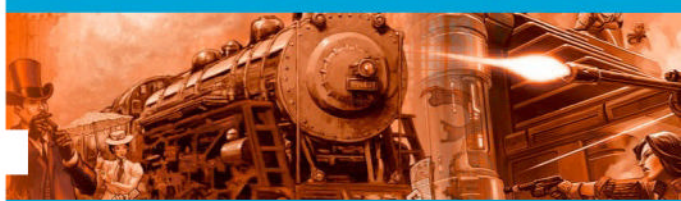


£25

GET IT? YES



2014



A Good All-Round Year for Gaming

Words by **Matthew Vernal**

Twenty fourteen was a year marked by social unrest and world shaking events, seeing Russia forcibly exited from the G8 (now G7) after its controversial annexation of Crimea, the first marches for the Black Lives Matter movement and Hong Kong protests which reignited a global conversation on equality, whilst in slightly more uplifting news, the first trending video for the Ice Bucket Challenge went live, with the trend going on to raise an estimated £200 million worldwide.

The escapism offered by great games became all the more important in 2014. Let's look back now at some of the most important releases and events for tabletop gaming that year.

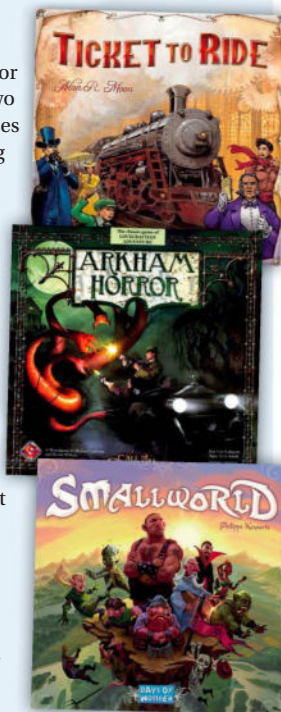


ASMODEE PURCHASES DAYS OF WONDER AND FANTASY FLIGHT

Fitting for an industry where *Monopoly* is a major name, 2014 saw two of the biggest names in tabletop gaming bought out by an even bigger one.

Founded way back in 2002 and responsible for such big names as *Ticket to Ride* and *Small World*, Days of Wonder was the first of the two companies to be acquired by Asmodee in August 2014. This was a massive step for the French-based company, getting hold of not only a major name in the North American games industry, but one with a track record (if you'll pardon the pun) of delivering high quality digital adaptations, such as the multi-million selling app version for *Ticket to Ride*.

After establishing a foothold in the US market, it was only a few months until Fantasy Flight Games also joined the ranks of Asmodee in November. Whilst Days of Wonder gave them a strong stable of games popular across the world, FF expanded their range of great titles and licences. With the likes of Star Wars, Lord of the Rings and popular tabletop franchises such as the *Arkham Horror* Franchise, Asmodee was able to ride the wave of Collectable Card Games and rapidly grow, cementing their place as number two behind the largest tabletop gaming company in the world, Hasbro.



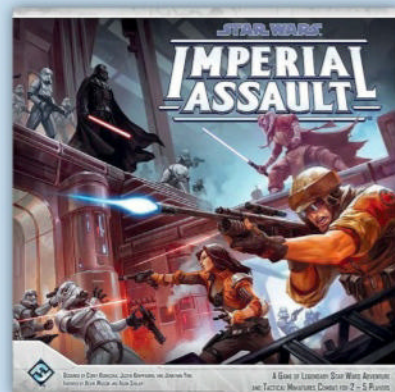
STAR WARS: IMPERIAL ASSAULT

Speaking of Star Wars, after FF's massively popular miniatures series *X-Wing*, they decided to create a spin-off of their beloved *Descent* series set in a galaxy far, far away.

Said galaxy is under the tight grip of the Empire, but hope remains with a plucky band of up to four heroes, looking to put an end to its diabolical reign (and defeat the games master playing as them.)

The core game came with a massive array of miniatures, dice and adventures for players to explore, engage and overcome. Slight tweaks and changes were made to the *Descent* blueprint that helped make the heroes feel more heroic (and the villains more villainous.) From the way combat focuses more on tense firefights and less on bullying the party's weakest link, to how both sides have their own quests to complete and further the campaign to a dramatic finale.

Naturally for a game series about going on wild adventures, the game was heavily expanded over the following years, with six big-box expansions, a companion app that allowed for solo or co-op play and shedloads of more miniatures. It's safe to say that if you start exploring this sci-fi spectacular, you'll likely run out of shelf space before you exhaust the vast offering of cosmic content available.



➔ 2014 was at least good for games, but 2015 was even better.



SPLENDOR

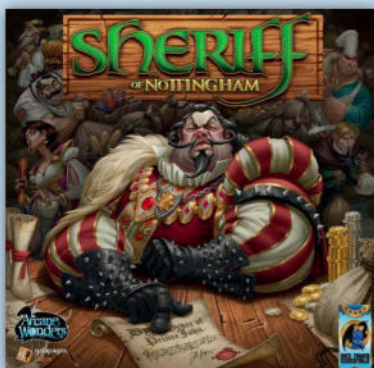
A family hit that combines the thrills of raking in a pool of winnings with the puzzle of searching out the best deals in a seasonal sale, *Splendor* is a gem collecting game with a somewhat loose “renaissance jewellers” theme, but an incredibly solid core loop. Players are looking to gain renown by fabricating necklaces and earrings by cashing in gemstone poker chips. Players



can choose to either grab gems from the communal pool of rapidly diminishing options or cash in their earnings for cards, the better of which will also score points but all of them provide a permanent discount to future purchases in a specific colour.

The constant back and forth of trying to access what’s valuable to yourself and to others, finding ways to snatch away the gems in greatest demand, gives the game a satisfying pace and feeling of success when you outwit your opponents.

The game was very popular upon release, earning a trove of awards (although it did come short of winning that year’s *Spiel Des Jahres*) and has since seen a Marvel rethemed edition (with players collecting the Infinity Stones, naturally) as well as a compelling two-player mode, *Splendor Duel*.



SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM

Another game that has you being merry merchants (though a little more literally in this circumstance) *Sheriff of Nottingham* is the fourth but most popular re-implementation of a smuggling mechanic first seen in 1950’s *Contraband*.

Each player is trying to make a fortune selling goods (with illicit goods like wine and cross worth more than bread and cheese) but to get to market, they must first present the Sheriff player of that round with a sealed bag, declaring a good and contents number. The Sheriff must decide between letting them through or giving the bag a rummage to see if the player is lying. If they were, the guilty smuggler pays a hefty fine, but if they were honest, the Sheriff must pay them instead for time wasting. Add to this the ability to bribe the Sheriff to either protect your bag or get them to open other player’s bags and you have the recipe for a big laughs bluffing game.

Sheriff of Nottingham was notable for being the first game to have the “Dice Tower Essentials” badge, a collaboration between publisher Arcane Wonders and well-known tabletop reviewer Tom Vassel, to highlight games that offer a unique and charming experience.

With a smattering of awards, expansions and a shiny second edition released in 2020, *Sheriff* shows how fun it can be to bend the rules every now and then.

RENEGADE GAMES FOUNDED

Renegade Games is the fifth business venture helmed by industry veteran Scott Gaeta, known previously for their work with Upper Deck Entertainment and co-founding Cryptozoic Entertainment

(publishers of the *DC Deck Building* products and creators of many beloved *World of Warcraft TCG* expansions.)

Having had great success with card games and collectables, Scott had grown to love the rapidly growing hobby board game industry, looking to create a studio dedicated to publishing and producing high quality games that can be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

The company has worked hard to maintain strong working relationships with design studios across the world, with the likes of Foxtrot Games (creators of the charming two-player title *Fox in the Forest* and challenging space deduction game *The Search for Planet X*) and New Zealand based studio Garphill Games (who make the very popular mediaeval worker placements titles in the *West Kingdom* series.)

That’s not to say the company hasn’t had their own hits, the biggest of which being the push your luck fantasy deck builder *Clank!* which has spawned several spin-offs and expansions (including the much loved *Clank! Legacy*) as well as massively popular licensed properties like *Power Rangers: Heroes of the Grid* and *Vampire: The Masquerade Rivals*.

It’s clear to anyone that Scott and his team are dedicated to their goal of shining a light on games of all shapes and sizes, here’s hoping many more years of stellar titles await them!



LACRIMOSA

Composing a perfect victory

Designer: Gerard Ascensi & Ferran Renalias | **Publisher:** Devir



There is an oft-voiced criticism of Euro-style games; that “theme” is an afterthought.

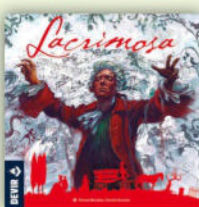
Designers will sometimes build a game entirely mechanically, waiting for the publisher to choose art, story and setting. I remember reading an interview with Bruno Cathala about the game *Abyss*, where he explained it could have ended up being set in any one of a dozen settings and still worked exactly the same way.

Sometimes this flavourful lick of paint can be rather superficial, applying a theme that is only tangentially related to the underlying mechanics of play. Whether shearing sheep, arranging beach towels and hunting down dragons, the gameplay functionally ignores this in favour of players purely interacting with systems to score points.

I’m not pointing any of this out to imply that it’s ‘wrong’ - manipulating your game engine to rack up victory points can be incredibly satisfying - but I am laying groundwork to discuss the opposite experience; for *Lacrimosa* is a game absolutely wrapped in its theme.

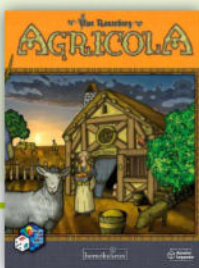
For those of you who are as unfamiliar as I with the history of classical music; Mozart was a famous composer from the 18th Century. His last work was a Requiem in D Minor, and he died with the final movement unfinished. His widow, Constanze, was left in a precarious financial position, and was forced to work with other, less famous, composers to finish the piece. The game, *Lacrimosa*, is named after the section Mozart had reached on the moment of his death.

The challenge here is to play your part in the legend of the Requiem. To write your name in history, tied to Mozart’s magnum opus! Players face a very specific puzzle, a balance of travelling around post-Renaissance Europe, documenting memories, writing opus works, performing or selling music and composing movements of the Requiem itself, and trying to do it all a little better than their opponents.



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 1 Rule
- ▶ 4 scoring shield tokens
- ▶ 4 Game summary tiles
- ▶ 1 First Player marker
- ▶ 45 Story Point counters
- ▶ 4 Composer portrait tiles
- ▶ 40 starting cards
- ▶ 5 Constanze cards and 10 Constanze counters
- ▶ 48 player pieces (12 per player)
- ▶ 11 Soloist cards
- ▶ 60 Composer tiles
- ▶ 15 City tiles
- ▶ 16 Royal Court tiles
- ▶ 15 Period Bonus tiles
- ▶ 46 Opus cards
- ▶ 34 Memory cards



It’s a meaty challenge, and part of that weight lies within the game’s setting. I’ll admit that I’m not particularly familiar with how itinerant musicians in 1790s earned their money, and it took an hour or so to get our heads round the concepts, terminology and iconography spread throughout *Lacrimosa*. The rulebook is reasonable, but definitely takes a share of the blame; we eventually ended up setting up the order of Composer tiles on the Requiem track by looking at a picture of a game in play, rather than actually being able to follow the setup instructions. I’m not confident that we used Story Point markers vs counters correctly either, and I’m not sure if the rulebook will ever really tie up that ambiguity.

Rules aside, the artwork is on point, and player boards are neatly designed, dual layered to hold the Story Points and Finances track cubes, with your memory cards filing into little slots at the top and bottom each round. The game arc is comprised of five Periods, with four activation rounds in each. Although you take two new cards each round, all memory cards have an action half and a resource half; you must choose one option or the other - and each time, this is a decision that feels like pulling teeth.

Altogether, it’s incredibly tight, with only 20 actions to take in the entire game. Upgrading memory cards to gain better actions seems powerful, but is it worth losing a whole action, just so that some of the remaining 19 will be better? Should you keep an opus to score more Victory Points, or sell it to permanently increase your Finances? Each Period has a new specific bonus that rewards taking particular actions; this makes the decision space even tighter, trying to perform actions that score as many bonuses as possible, both now and at the end of the game.

My main critique of this game so lovingly built around a concept - to go down in history as part of the legend of Mozart’s Requiem - is that the game doesn’t seem to reward players who make the Requiem their ultimate goal. During my play, I focused on fulfilling my part in the grand historical narrative, whilst my opponent ignored this, and just concentrated on spinning out opus after opus, selling them for victory points and boosting his income and eventually gaining even more victory points. In the end I won, very narrowly, but it felt hollow, that playing against the spirit of the game could still have led to a win.

This is a novel and interesting euro game, and for a lover of literature and art from two centuries ago, I think there would be a lot to love here. To those without that interest keeping them hooked, the central puzzle of *Lacrimosa* probably doesn’t reward the investment of time that its lengthy setup and highly specific game theme entails. ●

CHRIS LOWRY

PLAY IT? MAYBE

Love Mozart? Love medium-weight board games? You’ll find *Lacrimosa* to be *molto bene*. Punk rockers and party gamers should probably look elsewhere.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED AGRICOLA

...both games have a similar complexity and length, and use a highly limited number of player actions to dramatic effect. *Agricola* doesn’t come with a tuning fork though

WEATHER MACHINE

As dreary as Cleethorps in February

Designer: Vital Lacerda | Publisher: Eagle Gryphon Games



The reason games are said to be designed rather than composed, written or created is that they have an intrinsic utility. Magritte can paint *The Son of Man* with no thought as to whether the poor bloke can see with that apple in front of his face. Games are different, they are machines and machines must function to have value, therefore they're designed. Good games though, not only have a machine that works but the user's interaction with that machine is mediated by an interface. An interface that ameliorates

are functionally simple but it's the ramifications of those turns that make the game.

There's no UI in *Weather Machine*. All the naked parts are on show and putting your hand into the whirling cams might take your fingers off. There is no attempt here to slowly introduce the complex concepts to the players. It's been splatted on the board, all at once, and you have to try and work it out and you will work it out because you've paid 120 quid for the privilege.

In *Weather Machine* you place things

an allegory for life outside the upper middle classes it's great as an enjoyable ludological experience it certainly is not.

It is just so frustrating in that arbitrary way that it seems the designer just wants to make the game difficult for you for the sake of it. You build things and to do so you need cogs of different colours that you collect throughout the game but to use them they need to come from the same horizontal row in your workshop. There seems to be no thematic reason for this. It just seems to be there to make it harder to do. To slow the game down. Maybe this is a conspiracy on the part of *Big Wig*, because it made me want to pull my hair out.

It seems to me that this game is a result of a surfeit of success. At this point any Vital Lacerda game with Ian O'Toole art will do gangbusters on Kickstarter and so free rein can be given to any idea the designer wants. You see it with writers and film directors, as they become more powerful than those that edit their work, their work becomes unwieldy and self indulgent, this is the case with *Weather Machine*. There seems to have been less care in this one than previous Lacerda/O'Toole productions. For instance, on one section of the board coloured cogs are used to indicate that they must be spent to fulfil the action, the exact same icon is used on another part of the board simply for decoration. It is that kind of slipshodness that can be the indicator of too much success.

This game needs editing. It needs refining. The mechanisms need tooling. This crawl to greater and greater complexity in these kinds of games is not an eternal good. You can just get too fiddly and *Weather Machine* is that.

Euro games are clean burning engines that have great performance. With *Weather Machine* you'll get COPD from all the fumes you inhale just trying to keep the bloody thing going. ●

BEN MADDOX

PLAY IT? NO

Too much. Nothing coherent. This *Weather Machine* produces drizzle.



the raw complexity of the machine and allows our limited cognition to manipulate it. Like a key that starts a car. Most people, when confronted with the naked componentry of an engine, will have no idea what to do. It's the same with games, without a simplifying user interface most players will become bogged down in simply making the machine run rather than having fun with it. Games are not an engineering degree, so if this is true about the game, it fails. *Weather Machine* fails.

Up to this point I have been a staunch defender of Vital Lacerda. While undoubtedly complex his games have always presented the player with a cunningly simple UI. The play of a card or the placement of a token. The gradual revealing of the board. Ramping up the complexity of decisions as the game progresses. Kanban and Lisboa are beautifully designed machines and their UI, even better. Your turns

to get other things that have arcane names to try and persuade you that there is any theme attached to the game whatsoever. This affects other sections of the board in a series of effects that are, simultaneously, wilfully opaque and prescriptive, forcing you down a certain path of actions whether you want to go there or not. Before you can go down the path though there are a hundred, little, fiddly rules on where to move some things, on what spaces you can go to collect other things and increasingly frustrating limits on what you can do and when.

Everything is available from the start leading to a spaghetti junction of decisions and this results in the game having no definable arc. It feels as difficult to do things at the beginning as at the end and there is never that wonderful feeling of agency as you warm up into the play of the game. You grind, all the way through. As



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- Game board
- Laboratory per player
- 4 Player aids
- 4 Scientist meeples
- 12 Bots per player
- Scoring marker per player
- 5 Voucher markers per player
- Initiative marker per player
- Turn order marker per player
- 3 Funding markers per player
- 6 Breakthrough markers per player
- 3 Government markers
- Lativ marker
- Assistant marker
- 5 Lativ bot markers
- 12 Citation markers
- 5 Lock tokens
- 12 Award token
- Nobel prize
- 10 Government research markers
- 15 Lab research markers
- 10 R+D research markers
- 25 Chemicals
- 15 Extreme weather tiles
- 15 Experiment tiles
- 30 Workshop tiles
- 15 Subsidy tiles
- 36 Goal tiles
- 50 Machine parts

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED LISBOA

...and lament the paths not taken.



DOMAIN OF MIRZA NOCTIS

Bloody Marys all round for this horror themed RPG in a box.

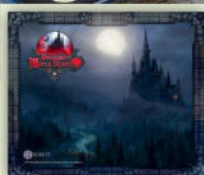
Designer: Jonathan Mariucci, Nathan Loos, Alkaterini Kimoundr | **Publisher:** Mariucci J Designs



The villager gasped in shock. Perhaps it was her calling as a medium, or her dhampir origin. Regardless, she knew that her impoverished village was in mortal danger. Rousing her neighbour, a renowned witch, the two friends (and viper familiar) ventured forth...

This is the fourth volume in the *HEXplore It* series, and the best to date. Players create a Hero choosing a Role (profession) and an origin. Up to six players are supported but I find it best with one or two controlling a couple of Heroes each. The Roles included in this box are particularly relevant to the horror theme, but may be used in any volume. Each Role has two unique Masteries which cost energy to use. For example the Medium acts in combat through Spirits she has possessed, whereas the Witch uses Afflictions to boost her energy-sapping Mastery. Masteries are typically coupled with other Hero stats and increase commensurately. All Hero stats are increased by blind draw Power Up cards. Whilst a Striker and Healer combination will always be effective, I find it rewarding to find synergies between two Utility or Support Heroes.

Once established, the group is entirely free to decide where to travel, including whether to move during the day or night. They may



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 3 Reaper miniatures
- ▶ 36 Rune stones
- ▶ Rune stone bag
- ▶ Hex dice bag
- ▶ Metal day/night coin
- ▶ 48 Wooden cubes
- ▶ 28 Dice
- ▶ 6 Dry erase markers
- ▶ 9 Punch boards (world and dungeon hex tiles)
- ▶ 27 Dry erase placards - 12 roles, 18 bosses, 5 game play, 1 battle mat
- ▶ 16 Dry erase familiar cards
- ▶ 30 Race and aspect cards
- ▶ 216 Event and power up cards
- ▶ 84 Dungeon and magic cards
- ▶ 5 Tuck boxes
- ▶ Art poster



wish to tackle an Investigation, visit a Monastery or Crypt, or fight a Boss. Whilst in the open, the group rolls a D6 to determine the applicable Circumstance. Circumstances include Investigations (curious happenings in the world), Events, Discoveries, Afflictions, Boss Bounties and Treasures. Rolling a 5 or 6 however will result in a blind draw enemy Encounter which may only be avoided if the group has travelled Cautiously this turn.

Combat is simple and sees enemy action determined by a d6 roll. All actions are simultaneous with enemy status recorded on a Battle Mat. Dry erase mats are also used for Heroes, obviating the need for hundreds of tokens.

The Villain, Mirza Noctis, has the final say each turn. His action is determined by a D12 roll and you have a one in four chance of sending another Collector into a Village to obtain blood. Collected blood, growing at increasing rate, empowers him, but fortunately it may be reduced.

Runes are an essential resource. They are obtained from Boss bounties, completing Investigations

and exploring the Dungeon. The subterranean Dungeon, under the Crypts, is a new location for the series. It offers a large haul of Runes provided the group can overcome its traps and resident enemies – a dangerous but rewarding addition. Runes turned in to Monasteries or Crypts reduce the Blood Pool and also yield Power-Ups and Graces. They may alternatively be sold in Villages.

Bosses are inventive and thematic. The final Boss fight against Mirza Noctis, occurring either at Blood Level 100 or when the group travels to his castle, is the most interesting to date. He is a real trickster and will punish groups who rely on repetition.

The game excels in its atmosphere of horror and blood, through Events and Investigations (golem experiments, secret catacombs, a cursed candle, a thistle coffin), and its inhabitants. Heroes learn Blood Magic, obtain Familiars, and may extend their involvement after death by becoming a Zombie or a Ghost.

Randomness is profound throughout, often leading to memorable moments. The size of the two Circumstance decks ensures you only access a tiny proportion in any one game. The speed at which Mirza Noctis gains power through blood collection is another major variable.

The rule book is clear and well written and illustrated with many examples. Keywords and conditions are listed on player aids for easy reference. ●

DEBBIE BROWN

PLAY IT? MUST PLAY

RPG fans and devotees of randomness will delight in exploring this horror drenched world and enjoying the twists and turns of fortune. Very generous content. The Dungeon adds a whole new experience.

TRY IF YOU LIKE... SLEEPING GODS

Try this if you like *Sleeping Gods* for the freedom of choice, or *Tales of Arabian Nights* for zany randomness.



KLIK'S MADNESS

Events clicking smoothly into place in the Runecrest Valley

Designer: Jonathan Mariucci, James Spaid, Frank Calcagno



Klik's Madness is an adaptation of the *HEXplore It* exploration game *Valley of the Dead King* – turning it into adventure book form, or more accurately into a hybrid form as it requires the base game.

The events of *Klik's Madness* take place before those of *Dead King* as we witness the rise of the titular Goblin Emperor and understand why he appears as an undead Boss in *Dead King*. A brief tutorial introduces four chapters comprising a substantial campaign during which Heroes reach far higher levels than in a game of *Dead King*.

To start, players pick a Hero to play, choosing a Role and origin. Each chapter will explain how to create the map for that chapter using hex tiles from *Dead King*, which group actions or locations will trigger Campaign Events (i.e paragraphs to be read in the book), applicable tables of circumstances, and win conditions.

The gameplay cycle will be familiar to players of *Dead King*. Each turn represents a day. The sun rises, the group travels on the map to their desired destination rolling for skills as usual, then they will either roll for a Circumstance or trigger an Event. Combat works in the same way as usual (lots of goblins involved), and some *Dead King* Bosses will be encountered. Finally the Villain acts and this action will be chapter specific

– for example in chapter two goblins spread out radially from their lair and if they reach a settlement they will destroy it.

Time passes throughout, and this is a key gameplay element designed to ensure that players have to prioritise. Each chapter will instruct players to create a Timer Deck from the Power Up deck, representing the time available to complete it (35 cards for example). Time is spent travelling and waiting in game, or occasionally recovered if something beneficial happens. At times players may choose to take Power Up cards from the Timer Deck as reward. A further card is turned sideways after the Villain Phase marking the end of a day. Remaining Power Up cards are used as normal for boss battle rewards, but this will now be a smaller and unrepresentative deck. The developers wanted to use only existing components but I regard this as a slight flaw in design, particularly for large groups fighting multiple bosses, but one that is easily remedied.

Story events often include “heroic moments” applicable to certain Roles or origins, which feels like a stroke of genius! *HEXplore It* Roles are very specific professions – Weapon Smiths, Apothecaries, Oracles, Beast Masters and many others – they all have their opportunities to shine. Mages such as Elementalists have great fun. Hero

origins help with gaining allies or pacifying foes. Healers and heavies are often in demand and any Assist class may help an elderly woman shift a heavy beam (what could possibly go wrong?). Qualifying Heroes will read an additional paragraph and potentially earn further reward.

There are several major decisions and numerous minor decisions along the way ensuring replayability, and progress is recorded on campaign sheets using keywords as you'll recognize from similar titles.

The book is produced to a very high standard – hard covers, three ribbons, glossy paper, a comprehensive reference guide. The story won't win an award for originality – gather allies and craft a gizmo before facing a tough final battle, but the writing is excellent, often humorous in classic high fantasy style, and the standard of proof reading high.

For fans of *Dead King*, this book really fleshes out the world of Runecrest Valley – its cities, inhabitants and NPCs come to life. NPCs even have their own quests (rats in the basement again!). ●

DEBBIE BROWN

PLAY IT? MUST-PLAY

A perfect complement to the original game in campaign format, optimising Hero Roles and bringing the Runecrest Valley to life.



TRY THIS IF YOU LIKE STORM WEAVERS

Storm Weavers for another hybrid, or game books series such as *Legendary Kingdoms* or *Fabled Lands*





NIGHTMARE PRODUCTIONS

Lights, camera, zombies

Designer: Reiner Knizia | Publisher: Trick or Treat Studios



Human game factory Dr Reiner Knizia has designed a lot of titles over his – in boardgame terms – long career, and many of his older designs have been republished under new names with new themes. It's possible for fans of his work to have conversations that go something like 'Have you ever played *Loco*? 'No, but I loved *Botswana*'. 'Hey you two should play *Wildlife Safari*'. Before a fourth person points out they're all talking about the same game.

So, it is with *Nightmare Productions*, previously known as *Hollywood Blockbuster* and *Dream Factory*, but now rethemed from Hollywood's Golden Age to horror movies. Along with your fellow producers, you're going to be finding directors, musical scores and monsters for horror movies of varying quality. Finishing movies allows you to claim points from a limited pool of tokens, and for casting the best monsters, creating the best overall movie, or even just creating the first, you'll score extra points.

The system for doing this is – in common with many Knizia designs – refreshingly simple. Each player has some money in the form of cardboard tokens, and you bid on a succession of movie assets as they're revealed, using



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Game board
- ▶ 93 Production tiles
- ▶ 50 Money tokens
- ▶ Start player marker
- ▶ 5 Player screens
- ▶ 22 Screenplay strips
- ▶ 30 Rating markers
- ▶ 11 Awards with stands



a Brag bidding mechanic: either you raise the bid, or you drop out. When one person is left, they claim the asset. The twist – which doesn't make complete thematic sense but there you go – is that, instead of paying your bid to the bank, you pay it to the other players.

This means that – even if you don't want a particular location or weapon – you're motivated to bump the price up as much as possible so not only will the eventual winner be drained of buying power next round, but you'll have more. It creates a nice rhythm, familiar to players of games like *Jaipur* and *Ra*, where missing out on a lucrative scoring opportunity doesn't feel so bad, because the winner is temporarily weakened, and you'll be in for a couple of easy rounds.

If we're going to talk about legendary boardgame designers, Reiner Knizia is certainly in the conversation, and not just for being prolific. Though his games often don't

have strong themes – one reason why they're so easily renamed and repackaged – the core mechanisms, the central gameplay loops, are usually rock solid.

So it is with *Nightmare Productions*. The bidding puzzle is simple, fun, and designed so that losing doesn't put you out of the game. In fact, you can see what's going to be coming up in future auctions, so if there's a particular monster or direction you're keen to grab, you can strategically lose some of the auctions beforehand in order to guarantee you'll have the buying power to claim it.

The race to claim particular point tiles and the awards for, for example, the first movie in each genre, also creates a nice tension, as you can't always sit back gathering your ideal assets. Not only this but the range of scoring opportunities mean that even if you get pipped to the post in one area, you'll usually be able to take advantage of points unclaimed elsewhere.

The artwork in this edition is functional but unspectacular – it adequately signposts the theme without popping or enhancing gameplay. It's certainly nice to have standees for the various trophies, and the available assets are easy to assess at a glance.

And maybe that's a good summary of the game as a whole. It's pretty great, especially as a game you might end an evening with or squeeze in over a lunchbreak. At five players it maybe runs a little long for the depth on offer – you're looking at around an hour and a quarter including setup – but the skeleton holding its monstrous frame together has survived the two decades plus since its inception relatively unscathed.

It's good, is what I'm saying. Not Oscar-bait, but a crowd-pleaser with a low barrier to entry. 🍿

TIM CLARE

PLAY IT? YES

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED WILDLIFE SAFARI

Modern Art and *Ra* are two established bidding games with mechanisms distinct enough from this that, if you enjoy the back-and-forth of either, you'll probably find something in *Nightmare Productions*. Also, if you liked Reiner Knizia's brilliantly simple *Wildlife Safari* – a bidding/speculation game where the theme has almost no connection to what you're doing – you're likely to get a kick out of this altogether meatier fare.



BN1

Brighton, actually

Designer: Paul Stapleton | **Publisher:** Bedsit Games



If directors make films as love letters to the cinema, then board game designers – at least if *BN1* is anything to go by – make games as love letters to places. In this case, it's Brighton – the South Coast's hilly home of sun, sea and supersized seagulls that nick your chips. For those who've had the pleasure, it's hard not to be won over by the city's mix of creativity and inclusivity, set to the backdrop of a pebbly beach and faded Regency architecture. But will the board game A) Satisfy existing dwellers and daytrippers? and B) Be enough to attract new visitors?

The game positions players in the latter group, as a bunch of friends who can't agree on where to visit when arriving at the train station. It's agreed everyone will roam solo, visiting various destinations to collect anecdotes (points) before racing back to the station with the best stories. As home to the UK's first, and only,

constituency to vote in a Green Party MP, it's only fitting that this is a path game. Whilst there are buses and cabs available, much of the sightseeing can be done the eco way: on foot.

There are two ways to move – either by a traditional pair of dice, no doubt catering to the family sector, or by action cards personalised to each character. As you'd expect, turns are much more random with the dice and the overall playing time bothers the 60m end of the clock, if not a little over if low scores are consistently rolled. The action-card option naturally lessens the element of luck, and speeds the game up as the majority of cards carry high move values. Subsequent turns can be planned a step ahead too, for even quicker play. And if that wasn't enough reason to choose cards over dice, some action cards come with add-on moves to boost your turn.

Dice still have a purpose even if they're not being used to determine

movement. Land on a shop square and you'll have the option to buy an item (an instrument for busking, an autograph book for bumping into local legends, a brolly for sharp showers etc.) or shoplift it. Choose a life of crime and your success will be determined by the roll of a die. Get away with it? Keep the item. Get caught? It's off to the police station. Brighton is not a city full of thieves, but this irreverent storytelling does nod to its light-hearted, often rebellious, free-spirit.

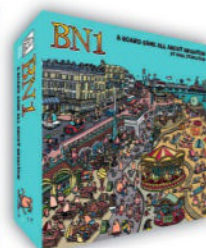
Ending up in the clink is sometimes the aim, as is a trip to the hospital, as it can provide useful teleportation to other-side-of-the board destinations. Because getting around is fairly easy – especially as there's a choice of one of two destination cards to choose from – the police station and hospital may not seem useful at first, but other players can make movement harder. A variety of 'sneak' cards inject some playful conflict, and are used to launch a host of annoying attacks from switching destination cards to summoning the clouds for an unexpected Sussex downpour. Without these, everyone would play in isolation, forgetting entirely they are not on this trip alone.

If all the above sounds strangely familiar, that's because this is a 10th anniversary edition. Reskinned with artwork by local illustrator Lisa Holdcroft, the theme runs lovingly throughout, capturing everything from the train station piano to the wounded West Pier with affection and a knowing wink. Humour is the game's greatest strength. Ultimately though, being a Brightonite is an advantage for appreciating all the Easter eggs *BN1* contains. ●

JENNY COX

PLAY IT? YES

Live in or been to Brighton? Say yes to *BN1* for a feel-good, irreverent time. For everyone else, there's charm and a few fun features but it might not have enough vegan meat on its bones.

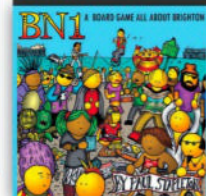


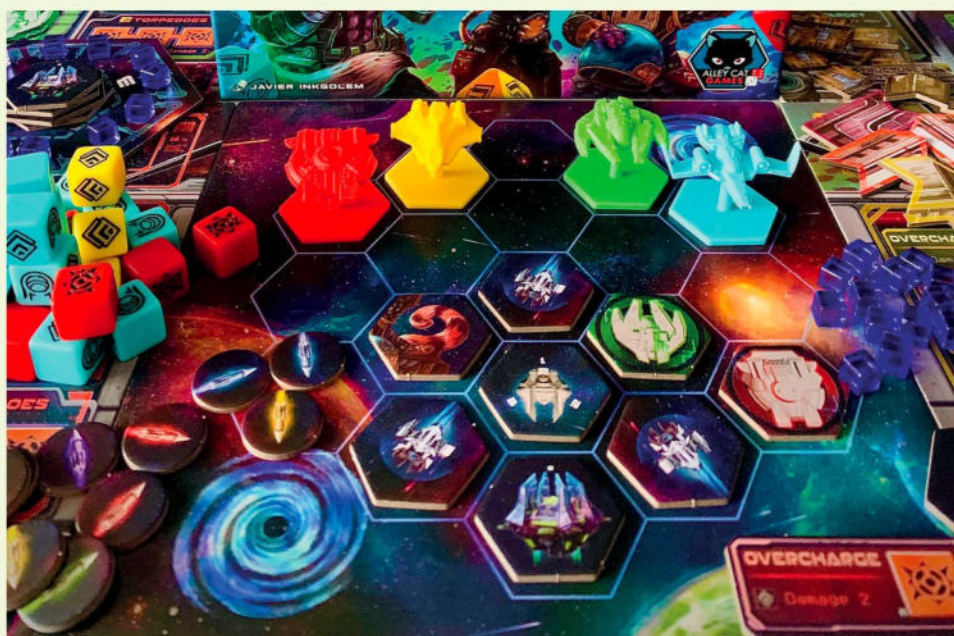
WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Board
- ▶ 80 Encounter cards
- ▶ 45 Shop cards
- ▶ 5 Player cards
- ▶ 45 Destination cards
- ▶ 3 City event figures
- ▶ 3 Brighton spirit figures
- ▶ 5 Player figures
- ▶ 5 Score tokens
- ▶ 60 Action cards
- ▶ 46 Sneak cards
- ▶ 4 Day saver cards
- ▶ 2 Road works tokens
- ▶ 19 Provisions
- ▶ 8 Shop tokens
- ▶ 28 Coin tokens
- ▶ 2 Dice

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED: BN1

If you have an earlier edition, this is a step up aesthetically without feeling like a victim of gentrification.





STAR FIGHTERS: RAPID FIRE

Real-time dirty dogfighting

Designer: Michael Dunsmore & Jordan Nichols | **Publisher:** Alley Cat Games

Despite its ubiquity, representing warfare and combat on the tabletop is tricky, even under the creatively liberating guise of science-fiction or fantasy. Sure, certain formulas have cemented themselves in the hobby over the years – from the drawn out detail of hex and counter games to the slicker, miniature showcasing mayhem of skirmish titles. But whilst each format offers a fun or interesting simulacrum of conflict, few tackle the micro-moments of frantic tension and unpredictable chaos one associates with the throes of battle. In *Star Fighters: Rapid Fire*, designers Michael Dunsmore and Jordan Nichols seek to rectify this with a surprisingly logical approach: Real-time dice-chucking.

Star Fighters: Rapid Fire is a quick-playing, tactical space combat game for one to four players. Across its four modes – solo, one vs one, three player last one standing, and two vs two team-play – players will only ever be fielding one ship, with this small scale reinforced by a similarly diminutive hex battle map. What this small scale



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Star map board
- ▶ 4 Double-sided player boards
- ▶ 4 Star Fighter miniatures
- ▶ 36 Custom dice
- ▶ 50 Acrylic shield cubes
- ▶ 8 Torpedo tokens
- ▶ 20 Hull damage tokens
- ▶ 12 Shield generator tokens
- ▶ Starbase board
- ▶ Starbase token
- ▶ 6 Starbase hull damage tokens
- ▶ 19 Solo cards



equates to is a level of involvement that feels both perilous and exciting, whilst remaining, crucially, manageable.

Each turn will see players simultaneously rolling their pools of custom dice and assigning them to the various systems on their personal ship boards. Dice can be rerolled any number of times, but once a player yells “FIRE!” all rolls must cease. At this point turns will pass back and forth as players activate any systems with dice assigned to them. Red dice are used for aggressive actions; firing lasers and torpedos, with options to boost their range or damage. Blue dice fuel movement, typically in straightforward thrusts and 60 degree turns. All the while, players must ensure they assign appropriate coloured dice showing ‘Command’ symbols to the Command section of their ship boards in order to perform activations – a necessity made easier with players’ ‘wild’ yellow Command die.

Needless to say, *Star Fighters* doesn’t shy away from piling on the pressure. Indeed, if the frenzy of real-time gameplay typically puts you off, this probably isn’t the game for you. But, if you’re a fan (or at least curious), *Star Fighters’* lightning quick bursts of dice-chucking are utterly engaging, yet brief enough to ensure players don’t mentally burn out.

Whilst the meat of the game plays out in real-time, there’s still plenty of tactical decisions to be made in the comparably reserved activation phases. As actions pass back and forth, players must respond based on whatever’s left of the systems they’ve prepared. Will staying in range and shooting first be worth the inevitable retaliation, or is a quick manoeuvre preferable, with the hopes of activating a plus one range laser next turn? With the systems available on each ship board being fairly limited, some may bemoan the game for lacking depth, but the



positive tradeoff is accessibility and snappy gameplay. Additionally, there’s a B side to each ship board, introducing unique specialities – an essential (in our opinion) variant that maximises the type of tactical play too easily avoided in the standard mode. Admittedly, the standard game is a great introduction, but without playing to a ship’s strength, battles can settle into a repetitive rut once players are in range of one another.

The addition of a solid, timer-based solo mode is a welcome touch but, ultimately, *Star Fighters* shines as a multiplayer experience. Furthermore, with its quick and exciting dogfights, it presents the perfect territory for rustling up some spontaneous tournament play. ●

CHAD WILKINSON

PLAY IT? YES

A quick blast of real-time fun, although its slick simplicity may hinder its longevity.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED STAR WARS: X-WING

Another real-time game would’ve been the obvious choice here, but as an alternate approach to interstellar dogfighting this is worth a look.



SHAPERS OF GAIA

Biome is where the heart is

Designer: Ian Cooper, Jan Gonzalez | Publisher: Wizkids



It's been thousands of years since ecological catastrophe forced humanity to shelter underground. Finally, you and several factions of scientists are ready to emerge and restore the planet Gaia. The race is on to engineer a variety of habitats and populate them with appropriate animals.

Mechanically, this involves moving your little Shaper figure across the hex-based board, plopping down restored 'biomes' which represent different types of terrain like water and forest, plus less familiar ones like 'mushroom' and 'temple'. You can also place animals in biomes by spending resources appropriate to the terrain. This involves taking a token from your playerboard and placing it on the main board because yes, this is a game with playerboards, and yes, it's

These mechanisms are more or less the entire game. The factions have some specific abilities which adds a bit of asymmetry, but mostly you're competing to build and exploit the most efficient terraforming – or terra-re-forming – engine. Placing most of your animals or exhausting the stack of biomes triggers the end of the game.

Shapers of Gaia has an engaging theme and bright, appealing art depicting a range of diverse characters. It makes a nice change from the slightly more po-faced Hard SF artwork that usual companions games with this sort of theme, a style befitting the lighter gameplay. The wooden tokens are clear and pleasingly tactile, and it all fits in a compact box.

This is not deepest

If the game has limitations, the main one is that your correct sequence of plays is often obvious – some powers you're better off claiming as soon as possible, and some are much cheaper to unlock than others – meaning that, despite the theoretical range of options before you, you often find yourself taking very similar actions, in a similar order, on consecutive games. The asymmetric faction powers and the ways in which different animals can offer you different score bonuses depending on things like their position relative to



one where taking something off your board reveals a little bonus.

This system of upgrades – familiar to players of *Terra Mystica* and *Scythe* and found in many other games besides – where, as you play more pieces from your board, your engine grows more powerful, is a winner almost everywhere I've encountered it, and it's a delight in *Shapers of Gaia* too. There are instant and ongoing abilities to unlock, as well as powers granted by the specific species you introduce, picked from a market of cards and added to the right of your playerboard.

game in the terraforming genre, nor the most tactile. There's a limited positional puzzle as you and your opponents get in each others' ways, claiming biomes or cards, but this tends to arise by accident rather than from deliberate blocking plays. You can push your engine to get missing resources or to teleport farther than your normal movement allowance, but doing so generates toxic counters – representing, presumably, your reliance on old, dirty technologies to crank out extra power – which count against your final score.

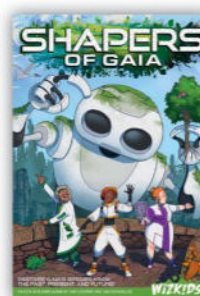
other species go some way to mixing things up, but you have less strategic freedom than it first appears.

But for some players, these constraints are a bug, not a feature. Fairly consistent patterns of play mean you can focus on the spatial puzzle, the maths of gathering the right resources, and the occasional bit of mild psychology as you try to predict what cards and hexes your opponents might have their eyes on, and decide whether to take some minus points to rush claiming one of them.

It's nice to see a game that caps its player count at three rather than half-heartedly trying to cover a wider range and ending up baggy or a slog at either end. Overall, *Shapers of Gaia* ticks a lot of boxes if you're looking for a lighter worldbuilder with a fresh style, that has just enough zing in its scoring puzzle to reward repeat plays. ●

TIM CLARE

PLAY IT? YES

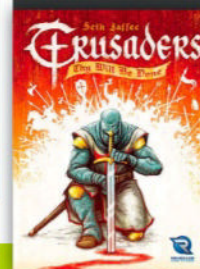


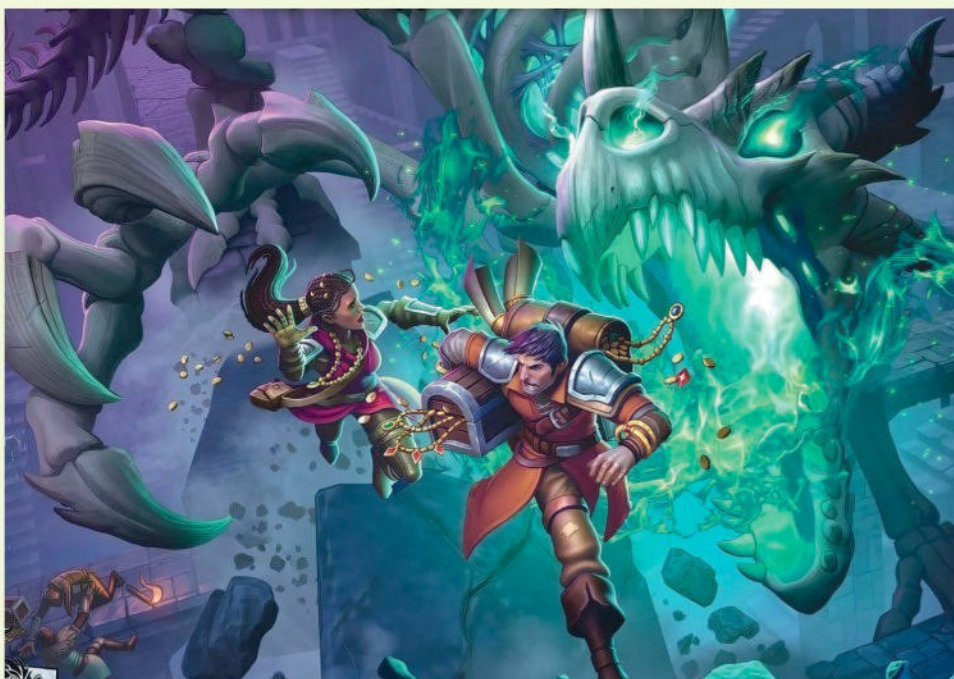
WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Game board
- ▶ 37 Biome tiles
- ▶ 6 Shaper boards
- ▶ 3 Resource tracks
- ▶ 3 Shaper figures
- ▶ Caretaker figure
- ▶ 30 Animal figures
- ▶ 15 Resource markers
- ▶ 18 DNA tokens
- ▶ 45 Prestige
- ▶ 30 Toxicity tokens
- ▶ 45 Species cards
- ▶ 9 Special species cards
- ▶ 3 Behaviour cards
- ▶ Scorepad
- ▶ 6 Reference cards

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED CRUSADERS: THY WILL BE DONE

While nowhere near the complexity or length of *Terraforming Mars*, *Shapers* offers some thematically-adjacent play and some of the same jostling for prime real estate. In particular, if you enjoyed Templar-themed euro *Crusaders: Thy Will Be Done*, this feels like a cousin in terms of weight and mechanics, and will doubtless appeal to a similar audience.





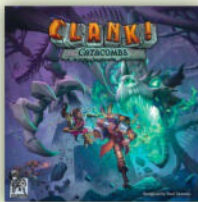
CLANK! CATACOMBS

New tiles same *Clank!*

Designer: Paul Dennen | Publisher: Dire Wolf



At the first glance, *Clank! Catacombs* might look like just a new edition of *Clank! The Deck Building Game*. The premise is the same: you are a band of adventurers searching for the artefacts in the dungeon, guarded by a scary dragon. The dungeon is deep and full of mysteries and monsters, and your every misstep or loud clank of a sword alert the dragon to your presence. As a simple explorer, you have no chance in a fight against the dragon, but you can try to escape the dragon before the creature's scolding fires make a BQQ out of you. The main mechanics are also the same: *Clank!* is a deck-building game. Each player starts with an identical hand of cards, which they can use to acquire more cards, that will offer a variety of actions each turn, including the ability to fight other monsters in the dungeon. The game's main temptation is also the same: you want to get deep into the dungeons to pick up the most valuable artefact and some other treasures along the way. But stay



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 29 Dungeon tiles
- ▶ 1 Clank! Board
- ▶ 180+ cards
- ▶ 140+ punch tokens
- ▶ 1 Market board
- ▶ 120 Player cubes
- ▶ 4 Player markers
- ▶ 24 Dragon cubes
- ▶ 5 Ghost cubes
- ▶ 1 Cloth dragon bag
- ▶ 1 Dragon marker



too long, make too much noise, and you might not be able to escape the dungeon alive and then it matters little how many shiny valuables your charred skeleton managed to collect.

So, the premise, rules and hook are all the same, why even bother with this new game, you may very well ask? Well, there is one major change in *Clank! Catacombs* and it makes all the difference. The original game (and some of its later versions, like *Clank! In! Space! A Deck-Building Adventure*) all came with the game board which depicted the whole of the dungeon. From the very start of the game, players could begin to plan their route through it and any pit stops they might take. Some unexpected things could still happen, however, players have a clear direction and a destination to aim for. *Catacombs'* dungeon, however, is composed of tiles which are revealed by

players as the game progresses. At the start of the game, players don't know where the artefacts are located, they don't even know how large the map will end up being and most exciting of all, they can travel in any direction they want. The simple incorporation of tiles adds a sense of wonder and adventure. Every turn of a tile is an exciting event that every player around the table is waiting with bated breath – could it be the artefact tile?! The game becomes a lot more about exploring rather than, as previously, perfecting the execution of a pre-planned route. The game also encourages players to be curious and delve deeper into the dungeon by including teleports that can transport players easily between different parts of the map.

Catacombs also has some other fun additions, for example, lock-picks. Some can be used to unlock certain paths. Although, it is worth keeping in mind that once unlocked, the path be available to everyone. Others allow players to free prisoners (for bonus victory points) or unlock major secrets (which offer a variety of helpful powers and perks). The number of lock picks are limited but there are plenty of temptations to use them, making decisions of when to spend one or not, critical to the end game scoring.

Clank! has always been a great mixture of deck building and push-your-luck mechanics, and *Catacombs* keeps these elements almost exactly as they were. If you played, any *Clank!* before there will be very little rule learning for this version. However, the addition of tiles makes such a huge and palpable difference that *Catacombs* immediately becomes essential. It is so good, in fact, that it may be time to retire your original *Clank!* box... 🍷

ALEXANDRA SONECHKINA

PLAY IT? YES

The addition of tiles in *Clank! Catacombs* is an absolute game changer. One element brings such a massive improvement to the gameplay, while other elements that made this series a success, remain unchanged.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED CLANK!: A DECK-BUILDING ADVENTURE

An existing owner of a *Clank!* game may be sceptical about getting another edition of the game. However, if you play *Catacombs* once, you will be immediately convinced.



ENCYCLOPEDIA

In the reference section

Designer: Eric Dubus & Olivier Melison | **Publisher:** Holy Grail Games



25-100m



1-4



12+



£60

According to Wikipedia, an encyclopaedia is a reference work providing summaries of knowledge to a general or specific field. Offering extensive detail, one imagines putting an encyclopaedia together to be an often-laborious task. A bit like playing *Encyclopedia*.

Set in the Age of Enlightenment, players are university scholars raising money to research animals around the globe, before publishing their findings. Everyone starts with two animal cards belonging to the same or differing continents, then looks to set collect. Sets can also be padded out by recruiting matching expert cards – a nice double-chance to build chunky collections.

This next stage of play takes place using continent-corresponding dice for worker placement – picked from a blind bag fresh from the Natural History Museum gift shop. 'Tis a compliment, by the way. Players need not despair if their pickings are slim, as everyone can choose from everyone's dice. If someone does nab your dice, you'll be compensated in three of four cases – thoughtfully taking the sting out of losing the colour or number you needed. Actions include picking up more animals or experts, as well as raising funds for research expeditions – either by collecting cash or by earning expedition tokens (collected on the board or earned along a separate tracker, triggered by various actions).

Embarking on expeditions is where the game gets sludgy. Working out how much money/expedition tokens are needed to research the different 'types' of an animal card becomes overly complex when a player wants to research multiple types. Simultaneous play would have oiled the wheels better as this juncture, but as it stands play grinds to a halt and opponents sit round twiddling

their thumbs, checking their phones and generally losing the will to live. After expeditions, players can publish their results – choosing when to score their research for maximum effect. Unusually, there isn't any competitive benefit to publishing first in an area – a missed opportunity?

The animal cards are one of the game's triumphs and are beautiful to look at. You'll find everything from emus to lemurs (we think, the names are all in Latin). Conversely, the human artwork is less attractive and, in some cases, bordering on scary. Another bothersome design

irk is the

to publish globally and not have to change the language each time. That's fair enough, but perhaps colour or iconography would have done the trick.

On the matter of clarity, test games were delayed by the need to check the rule book with inadequate game aids failing to lend a helping hand. Let's imagine this was intentional, offering players that realistic, encyclopaedia experience of looking stuff up...

Perhaps the real issues of *Encyclopedia* run deeper. It is inspired by a real-life naturalist, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, a man who had forward-



ostentatious board. Larger-than-life boards aren't a problem when they are utilised well, but this one

has proportion issues – especially the ill-judged 'publishing' section for the miniscule cubes. And without die-cutting to cradle these in place, cubes are too easily scattered across the table as players sweep across to reach the top.

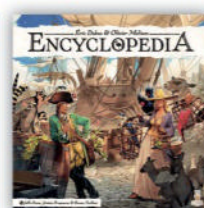
Although this was not a universal verdict from all test players, the board lacked clarity for some as to what the various segments do. Headers would have been appreciated, although some board-game companies naturally want

thinking theories about animals but pretty suspect ones about humans. Combined with the colonial-era artwork, this knowledge makes for an uneasiness. Besides, do the white European men of yesteryear really need more of the limelight? We are in our own Age of Enlightenment and – in this humble reviewer's opinion at least – should be diversifying historical games with untold stories. ●

JENNY COX

PLAY IT? MAYBE

Dice interactivity and animal artwork are in *Encyclopedia's* favour, but fussy mechanics tip towards boredom, while some may be uncomfortable with the history behind the theming.

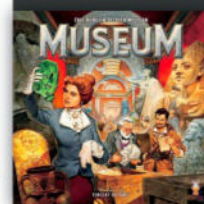


WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Board
- ▶ First player token
- ▶ 55 Expert cards
- ▶ 12 Round tokens
- ▶ 75 Animal cards
- ▶ Cloth bag
- ▶ 4 Reputation tokens
- ▶ 20 Dice
- ▶ 8 Score tokens
- ▶ 3 Token boxes
- ▶ 120 Research cubes
- ▶ 28 '5 cubes' tokens
- ▶ 69 Coin tokens
- ▶ 47 Royal seal tokens
- ▶ 54 Expedition tokens
- ▶ 4 Character extensions
- ▶ 4 Player boards
- ▶ 4 Game aid extensions
- ▶ 15 Continent cards (Solo mode)
- ▶ 3 Behavior cards (Solo mode)
- ▶ 3 Scoring cards (Solo mode)

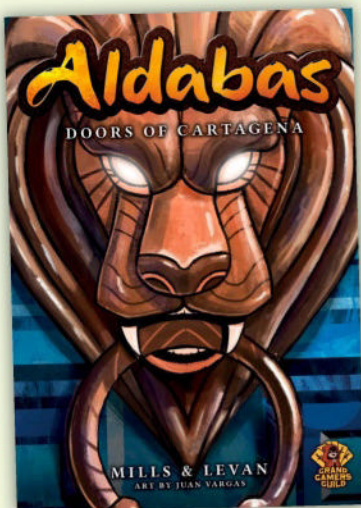
TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED: MUSEUM

Both *Museum* and *Encyclopedia* are brought to you by Eric Dubus and Olivier Melison, and share similar throwback themes and pleasing artwork.



ALDABAS: DOORS OF CARTAGENA

Designer: Nathaniel Levan & Joshua J Mills | **Publisher:** Grand Gamers Guild



In colonial Cartagena society, the design of door knockers could tell a lot about the family that lived behind that door, including their

status and profession. *Aldabas: Doors of Cartagena* refers to that past in its tableau-laying card game.

In this game, each card contains a door with a knocker icon that represents a different profession (thematically) and a different way of scoring the game (mechanically). Players will draft cards and play them down in the tableau in front of them to win majorities in categories and score the most points at the end of the game. However, at the start of the game, every player will also place one door card face down in the tableau, keeping it secret from the others. This adds a bit of mystery to the game, preventing players from being able to tell the winner ahead of time and adding a bit of drama in a form of the reveal at the end of the game.

There are a couple of rules to building up a tableau, for example, some colours can't be next to each other, however, *Aldabas* give players a lot of freedom



of choice. Every profession comes with two variations of power and there are opportunities for combos with clever placements of cards. Players also have an opportunity to sabotage by stealing coins from opponents' purses.

It is a simple game to play, but the powers and scoring options add much-needed variety. They are also the hardest part of the game to learn and unfortunately the player aid is located on the vault card that, according to the rule book, should be kept face down as part of the player's tableau for the whole duration of the game. A perplexing choice, considering it makes learning the rules and building the tableau more confusing. Aside from this component design oddity *Aldabas: Doors of Cartagena* is a light charming puzzle game with an interesting premise. ●

ALEXANDRA SONECHKINA

PLAY IT? MAYBE

GIFT OF TULIPS

Designer: Sara Perry | **Publisher:** Weird Giraffe Games

I can't claim to know much about delftware, that iconic white and blue, Dutch pottery. In fact, the main thing this distinctive style brings to mind whilst handling *Gift of Tulips'* lovely cards is the discrepancies between crockery found in the charity shops of affluent, rural areas versus those in the city. In any case, *Gift of Tulips'* aesthetic and uplifting flower festival theme are a unique pleasure to behold in a tabletop game.

In the game players will be exploring Amsterdam's famous Tulip Festival and competing to assemble the most colourful and valuable bouquets. Amidst a market of fluctuating tulip values, players must keep their eyes on both the festival and their opponents if they hope to succeed.

It doesn't take much imagination to assume set-collection to be the primary

mechanic here, but to do so feels somewhat reductive when considering the clever ideas going on here. Indeed, one of the main features of the game is actually gifting away some of your precious tulips rather than expanding your own sets. Whilst this will often yield immediate points, this decision is also guided simply by the fact that none of the three available actions (keeping, gifting, adjusting festival) on a turn can be repeated.

Two actions must be performed on a turn, each one preceded by drawing a card; this sequentially dispensed information resulting in decisions being made tactically rather than wholly strategic. It's a subtle yet interesting approach to turn structure



which helps differentiate *Gift of Tulips* substantially from other set-collection games.

This incomplete information extends to the ever-shifting values of tulips too. Whilst these values can be adjusted publicly, there's also the option to dump cards in the 'Secret Festival' pile, whereby, at the end of the game, a random five will (often dramatically) exert their influence.

On the whole, this is a lovingly produced, nicely interactive, and quietly unique little card game. As a bonus, it also won't smash if you drop it. ●

CHAD WILKINSON

PLAY IT? YES



HEROES OF NORMANDIE: BIG RED ONE EDITION

War without the boring logistics

Designer: Yann & Clem | Publisher: Devil Pig Games



Finally, a game that allows you to recreate the Second World War. While it's true that *Heroes of Normandie* breaks little ground in its choice of theme – a theme that has shown no signs of declining in popularity in the years since the game's original release – there's a reason why Axis vs Allies titles continue to flood publishers' lists. It's an inherently dramatic, conflict-filled period that shaped the world we live in today. The wealth of options is a boon for us lucky gamers, but it means any title faces stiff competition.

Heroes of Normandie is a scenario-based two-player tactical war game. You have a board divided into a grid, with varying types of terrain, then either side has cardboard tiles representing different units, such as infantry, armoured vehicles, etc. You can recruit units onto the battlefield, then each round you'll place numbered blocks onto your units, indicating what order you're going to activate them in. These blocks are one-sided, so you can see the numbers but your opponent can't, meaning you don't know what order the enemy troops are going to move and attack in. You also get blank blocks which allow you to bluff a unit you don't intend to activate.

In addition to moving or firing with your units, you can play cards which give you an edge, temporarily reducing a tank's defence, for

example, or forcing your opponent to reroll. These add variation, unpredictability and – obviously – a degree of swinginess to proceedings. The game uses dice to resolve attacks, modified by cover and the type of attacking and defending unit, so luck has an ever-present role. On the other hand, you mostly know the odds, so any risks you take are calculated ones.

Each scenario has a clear objective for either side – taking and holding a particular spot on the map, for instance. If you achieve your objective, you win. As is common in many wargames, this means that you're not always worried about winning an overall battle of attrition so much as making one concerted push or eliminating a particular unit.

The *Heroes of Normandie* system has been around for a while, and there's no question that it's a solid, fun set of mechanisms that recreate some of the feel of miniatures wargaming in a boardgame. Players new to the genre may take a few playthroughs to get to grips with how it works, but for anyone who has played titles like this before, it's pretty intuitive. You assign order priority, take it in turns moving or firing units in numerical order, then you draw some new cards and go again. Units flip to a weakened side if they take damage, and if they're hit again they're removed from the battlefield.

The more important question is: is this right for you? This is not

some hyper-realistic, simulationist rendition of the Second World War, with supply lines and meticulously-researched stats. The artwork is cartoonish rather than gritty, and the gameplay is set up for quick, video-game-like skirmishes rather than ponderous day-long engagements.

This means you should expect something that – from its artwork alone – feels a smidge less serious than *Undaunted: Normandy*. On the other hand, in terms of mechanics, progressive scenarios and playtime, it's operating in a similar space, though your ability to assign orders directly means the chain of command feels tighter, your control more direct (and possibly less realistic as a result). While both rely on luck, here the variable powers of the cards introduce more 'gotcha' moments, which may feel exciting or frustrating depending on your temperament.

In the end, *Heroes of Normandie* may be a title for those who aren't normally swayed by a Second World War theme, but want something fast-paced and cinematic – a Hollywood war that doesn't force you to reflect too much on the human cost. On that level, this is solid, popcorn-munching entertainment, with a generous amount of content to keep you satisfied. ●

TIM CLARE

PLAY IT? YES



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- 4 Platoons (2 x US & 2 x German)
- 6 Heroes
- 28 Wooden order markers
- 4 Dice
- 6 Two-sided gameboards
- Turn counter track
- 100 Cards
- 3 Destructible houses
- 7 Terrain elements
- Scenario book

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED BATTLELORE

Aside from the obvious comparison to games in the *Undaunted* series, fans of titles like Fantasy wargame *Battlelore* might appreciate the opportunity to change up themes without losing the rapid, dramatic feel of monster and magic based skirmishers.





FLIES, LIES AND SUPPLIES

Furry and furious

Designer: Jon Perry | Publisher: Arcane Wonders



I've always appreciated standalone expansions. When a title can deliver a complete experience as well as being able to bolster another game, it just feels like you've made away with a sweet deal, which is very much the case for this charming combat card game.

Whilst *Flies, Lies and Supplies* (replace "Flies" with "Spies" and you'll have the exact same mechanical experience, only with World War II theming instead of cuddly combat critters) doesn't stray too far from its predecessor (*Air, Land & Sea*) there's still an awful lot to like in this tense card-driven duelling game, where each player is battling for control over two of three different military theatres.

The core mechanics are still the same; each player is dealt six of the possible eighteen cards, with each card ranging from 1-6 strength and a different card for each theatre. Players take turns to either play a card face up in its matching theatre, adding its strength and bonus power to their side of the battlefield, or face down anywhere, contributing two strength to that theatre.

If either player feels like they might lose they can concede the round, giving their opponent some points, but not as many as if they had instead played out all six cards. Whilst dominating the field is always the main goal to victory, skilled players will find the right sequence of card plays to drag their opponent along to



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ 4 Player aid cards
- ▶ 18 Game cards
- ▶ 3 Oversized theatre cards
- ▶ 24 Cardboard tokens

ensure a crushing victory.

Whilst not quite as immediately evocative as battling over skies, surf and soil, this title takes you away from the front lines as you fight the battle for the home front, trying to gain superiority in Diplomacy, Economics and Intelligence.

Diplomacy cards offer a "give and take" advantage, as you sacrifice some information or strength to have a greater impact on your opponent, from flipping powerful cards to being able to draw a new card for you and your opponent to play.

Economics added another new feature, supply tokens! These let you reinforce the strength of your theatre without fear of repercussion, being entirely unable to be affected by your opponent's abilities.

Lastly, for when you're feeling confrontational, Intelligence shuts down your opponent's higher strength cards by either flipping them or forcing them to be played face down, whilst also stealing abilities or benefiting from your own facedown cards for maximum subterfuge.

As a standalone product, the game delivers on a similarly engaging experience that makes this dynamic blend of strategy with push-your-luck

a game system you really have to try. However, even though the mechanical variances are a welcome addition for players who've played the original to death, I don't feel that the game is as strong as its predecessor for introducing the system.

Don't get me wrong, even with its slightly more manipulation focused mechanics, it is still entirely possible to jump straight in with this game. But as a comparison? The original *Air, Land & Sea* delivers more bombastic changes of fortune that keep the pace rapid and games thrilling. I do love being able to *combine* both sets for a more intense gaming experience, whilst also adding a much needed boost to the strategy of the team multiplayer variant.

You can't really go wrong with either *Air* or *Spies*, in much the same way that both the WWII propaganda poster-esque art design and the anthropomorphic dieselpunk vibe from the *Critters At War* version are superbly illustrated to cater to different preferences. As it stands, *Flies/Spies* is just as tense and challenging a duelling experience you can want from a rapid paced card game. ●

MATTHEW VERNALL

PLAY IT? YES

Whilst not a reinvention of its predecessor, *Flies/Spies* still successfully delivers a new trove of thematic battlefronts that work fantastic alone or combined with *Air, Land and Sea*.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED: WATERGATE

Another relatively recently duelling delight, if you enjoy the constant back and forth where knowing when to conceal information is just as important as when to play your best card, both of these titles have it in spades.





COME TOGETHER

Born hippy

Designer: Vegard Eliassen Stillerud, Eilif Svensson & Åsmund Svensson | **Publisher:** Chillfox Games



It's the tail end of the sixties and a mixture of America's coolest and most annoying young people want to listen to live music outdoors. For those in search of profit, this heady mix of revolution and free love makes for excellent campaigning weather. Thus you and your fellow players set out to stage rival festivals – apparently over the same weekend – in order to bilk sundry hippies, funk fans and country music aficionados for as much money as possible.

Come Together is a game of worker placement and acquiring cards from a suite of tableaux. Over three rounds, representing a three-day festival, you're going to grab cards that let you expand your camping capacity, construct new stages, hire acts and bring in punters with differing musical tastes. At the end of each day, you'll need to assign each act to a stage and populate the crowd with the right mix of audience members.

At the same time, how much you score will depend on how successful your promotional efforts have been. You can promote across four media – radio, television, the newspapers, and fliers. More radio buzz boosts your up-and-coming new acts; TV coverage maximises bonuses from your star performers; newspaper coverage earns you more from the variable bonuses available each round, which reward you for things like having lots of upgraded stages or for expanding your campsite; fliers mean more people stick around for the next day of your festival at the end of each round.

Each turn you take within each round involves placing workers on the corresponding spot beneath the card you want. You don't get to claim the card until someone spends an action to activate one of the four areas, at which point everyone who has claimed a card in that area gets to take it, while also bumping them up a promotion track a number of spaces equal to the number of cards claimed. This means that, the more popular

a particular type of card is, the more incentive you have to claim one too, to share in the rewards once that area gets activated.

Come Together is a gnarly game – both in the surfer sense and in the way an old tree's roots are gnarly. It twists and writhes and for the first few turns you won't really know what you're doing or why. For a game with such a breezy, semi-humorous theme – the

There's a nice tension – a uniquely euro-y one – where you want to do everything, but know you'll only have time for maybe a quarter of those things. So what do you prioritise? Each time a player activates an area they bring the end of the round one step closer. This allows for tactically rushing the end of the day to deny other players the chance to grab all the cards they need.



star cards featuring non-IP-infringing pastiches of the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Simon and Garfunkel and more – the actual gameplay and paths to victory are surprisingly complex. Stages need expanding if you want room to host the biggest acts, which you can – mostly – only do by moving far enough up certain promotion tracks to trigger relevant bonuses. There's even a mini-game where, by matching symbols on adjacent stages, you build beer, pizza or water stands for extra points.

Once you're into it, however, a familiar rhythm takes over and what seemed impenetrable becomes an increasingly intuitive process of acquiring and fulfilling contracts.

The overall experience is good, but not excellent. It's a shame that the star deck boils down to essentially three cards – requiring two, three or four audience members respectively. There's no mechanical difference between the five colours of festival goers either, no higher scarcity or different scoring opportunities, so some of the apparent depth flattens out quickly. Ironically, *Come Together* never quite comes together to pay off on the potential of its systems, but if the theme appeals to you, it's all groovy. ●

TIM CLARE

PLAY IT? MAYBE

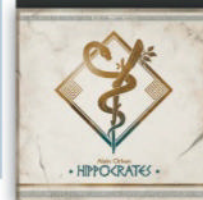


WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Game board
- ▶ 12 Location tiles
- ▶ 6 Newspaper tiles
- ▶ 16 Friend cards
- ▶ Round end card
- ▶ 90 Meeples
- ▶ 33 Stage upgrade tokens
- ▶ 18 Flower power tokens
- ▶ Countdown marker
- ▶ 128 cards

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED... HIPPOCRATES

Come Together finds its closest cousins in big euros like *Viticulture*, albeit with a little less variation on offer. If you enjoy games like *Hippocrates*, another title about acquiring and fulfilling contracts that is lighter than it initially seems, *Come Together* might be your speed.



CORRUPT PARLIAMENT

Self-interest has never been this deliciously satirical

Designer: Alan Wang | Publisher: BGNations



Satire is in a bit of trouble. In a cultural landscape that feels eerily like the Victorian age, troops of self appointed internet based *decency controllers* are there to make sure we don't taint the sunny uplands of corporate amiability. Woe betide anyone who doesn't #benice. This kind of cultural beigeification has particular efficacy in a scarily small margin industry like board games where a stern word could send your fledgling publisher falling out of the nest hitting every branch on the way down. So grin and be happy as you are spooned endless buckets of goblins and trees and the never ending parade of games with cats. Satire has trouble surviving in a climate like this. When the reductivist guardians of newspeak will never get the joke you might as well grin and try and choke down the fifteenth game this month about quilting.

Corrupt Parliament from BGNation might have a bit of trouble staring down the *Guardians of Proper Conduct™* because it contains, now get ready to clutch your pearls, references to sex and, as we all know, things that potentially make us feel icky or horny, have no place in a nice, clean pursuit like gaming (just be ready to have a neutered misunderstanding of a social studies concept at hand to justify your censorship). On top of that it mentions things like forced labour which we should never mention in something as trivial as a game because of the group of people I've decided I care about to get me hearts on twitter this week. Still, the world turns, human beings do dreadful things and vital forms of criticism, like satire, are an indispensable way of looking into our dark hearts. You just need to be able to get the joke which the performative reduction of twitter will never allow you to do.

The reason I take to *Corrupt Parliament* so strongly is that everything, the production, the mechanisms and



especially the writing, work to convey its brutally pessimistic view of a corporate run future and when things are this bad all you can do is laugh and *Corrupt Parliament* is both intentionally and unintentionally hilarious.

Each player is the controller of one of the

profitable aspects of society. These can be rather prosaic industries like pharmaceuticals and construction but also can range to the exotic like the legal sex trade and steroid juiced religion.

Somehow the players have managed to worm their way into parliament and are using their power to enact legislation that will line their own pockets as the player with the most money at the end of the game will be the winner.

Players are given shares in the industries that they control but also shares in the other industries throughout the game. These remain secret to the end of the round and when they are revealed could give you a controlling interest in these industries and net you even more cash. These shares are worth nothing though unless the industry's value can rise and this is where the laws come in.

Cards are dealt that propose laws that, if passed, will increase the values of these industries and the players are the ones to vote on them. They pass by majority and if one of your parliamentary colleagues doesn't want to vote your way, then you bribe them until they do. After three parliamentary sessions the game ends.

Like all great negotiation games, *Corrupt Parliament* lives above the table with its mechanisms there to promote interaction and there is a whole lot of it. It feels like nature, red in tooth and claw, as you scrabble to get your voice heard. Mechanically, this game is a vicious so and so.

It posits a world in which self interest rather than public service is the reason to enter politics and driven to its logical conclusion until only the outward facade of democracy remains.

Every aspect of the game supports this. The art drips with neon and grime and leaves you in no doubt that this is a world that has been wrung dry. The cover being one of the most arresting images I've ever seen on a board game box.

Then there's the writing. One of the most nakedly shocking things in the game. The description of the laws you're proposing are at once hilarious and horrific. This is magnified by the obvious use of digital translation. The results are sinister in their wrongness and beautifully evoke a future nightmarehouse. One of them reading: *Legitimate the trade of kidney and normalize black market(sic).*

All of this is great fun and you revel in the horror you do and this is the heart of satire. It makes you realise the attraction of the inhumane and, should, encourage you to try to ensure we never get to a point where this is our society.

This isn't a game for everyone though. If you are not up for shouting your way to victory or asserting yourself strongly this is certainly not for you. A pleasant Euro about market gardening it isn't.

Corrupt Parliament is undoubtedly a game with a message but it uses the gifts that games have to put that message across. It could have all of the biting satire of a Chris Morris movie but if it didn't function as a game it would be pointless but, thankfully, it does, to great effect. Let's just hope its bite doesn't get blunted by an anaemic western reprint. ●

BEN MADDOX

PLAY IT? MAYBE

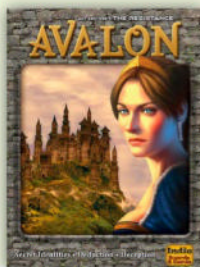
Wonderful if you like vicious negotiation games but if you're intimidated by shouting keep your distance.



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Game board
- ▶ 6 Dirty money markers
- ▶ 90 Insider trading tiles
- ▶ 6 Game shields
- ▶ 144 Money tokens
- ▶ 6 Industry cards
- ▶ 36 Proposed law cards
- ▶ 18 Negotiating bags
- ▶ 12 Voting cards
- ▶ 12 Double sided Starting tiles
- ▶ 108 Broker tokens
- ▶ 1 Drawstring bag
- ▶ 1 Speaker card

Additional imagery courtesy of @TheStartPlayer



TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED RESISTANCE AVALON

This game feels like a knife fight in a packed tube train and, if that's your bag, you'll love it.



FINAL GIRL

Fight to the death in this rollicking solo adventure

Designer: Evan Derrick, A. J. Porfino | **Publisher:** Van Ryder Games



Blimey, the past is a nice place. Not, the real past, that was grim. I'm talking about the past we construct of our own lives in our memories. This is a past in which we knock off the rough edges of experience. Serendipity, for instance, is a function of the past. Misfortune, on the other hand, is a function of the present. There are so many factors that conspire during an average day of life and it is misfortune that can, so often, dictate how you feel when you put your head down at night. If board games have an educational value it is in their ability to model treacherous things in a safe environment. *Final Girl*, from Van Ryder Games, is a wonderful exercise in misfortune management and it is only by mitigating the bad luck that you'll succeed.

In *Final Girl*, players step into the rather unfortunate shoes of a Laurie Strode or Nancy Thompson and find themselves pitted against one of the most enduring cinematic tropes, the psycho killer. The killer wields sharpened chance and it is the player's job to fend it off.

Players use a hand of action cards that allow them to move, attack and interact with the game mechanisms in certain ways, and a currency, time. They spend this currency to play the cards. The cards propagate dice rolls

to dictate the reward it will yield. Two successes and it's great, one is a neutered version of the perfect result and, as can often happen, zero will often eat up your time, increase the killer's menace or injure you.

This is followed by a phase in which the killer gets to act. Picking off extras and minor characters, increasing their blood lust and heading, inexorably, towards the *Final Girl* and the fulfillment of their desires.

The more people they kill the greater their blood lust which drives the game towards the finale and death or glory.

Final Girl thrives as a solo game. The addition of multiple players would diminish the effect that the game has. The killer rendered as mindless game mechanisms is the perfect analog for the slasher movie. There is no pleading, no appealing to sentiment. You flip the cars and the carnage happens and the only option you have is to fight back.

Also, as you gain equipment you get stronger and the game leads you elegantly to that inflection point, so important in this genre, where the *Final Girl* flings off the shackles of being hunted and turns into a warrior ready to face her foe.

The thing you have to bear in mind with *Final Girl* is that this is a game of dice rolling and if you don't find a way to ameliorate the 66% chance you have

of failing, you're going to be butchered in no time.

Thankfully, this is where the game shines. There are so many options here to fight back against misfortune by buying cards, by decreasing horror which gives you more dice to roll. *Final Girl* is a game of dice wrangling and it is in the timing of this that the game provides its challenge and truly engages the player.

Also, you can't get away from the fact that *Final Girl* is a tour de force in production. These things really shouldn't matter in the grand scheme but the production is an object lesson in efficiency and utility. The magnetic lids that you remove to become the killer and location boards are brilliant and should be mercilessly copied by other publishers. The art and design is perfect and betrays a real love for the subject matter and although in my plays I grew to hate the dice, you cannot deny the haptic crackle of throwing those big, red sods.

Final Girl is a challenge and riot. It is tense and exhilarating and it teaches you that misfortune only comes about if you don't prepare for it. ●

BEN MADDOX

PLAY IT? YES

This is a top tier solo experience if solo is your thing.



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

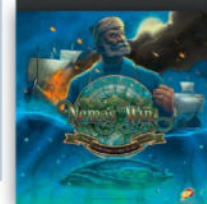
- Double sided Player board
- 23 Action cards
- 6 Custom dice
- 3 Victim holding board with matching tokens
- 9 Black and 2 White Final health tokens
- 2 Killer meeples
- Final Girl meeple
- Bloodlust marker
- 21 Victim meeples
- 25 Health markers
- 8 Tracking markers
- Time marker
- 3 Special victim markers

Camp Happy Trails/Hans the Butcher Scenario Box

- Location board
- 10 Event cards
- 5 Set up cards
- 6 Tokens
- 8 Terror cards
- 18 Item cards
- 3 Finale cards
- 3 Dark power cards
- Epic dark power card
- 2 Final Girl cards
- 16 Terror cards
- Killer board

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED NEMO'S WAR

With great card play and loads of dice rolling this is a roller coaster ride



ROBOTECH: RECONSTRUCTION

Politics and strife define the reconstruction period after the first Robotech War

Designer: Dr. Wictz | Publisher: Strange Machine Games



The *COIN* series from publisher GMT Games is a fascinating look at historical counter insurgency efforts. It's a brilliant collection of games that suffer from a high level of complexity and a general sense of unease due to the subject matter. Asking a friend to sit down and play as the Taliban for three hours is no small request. *Robotech: Reconstruction* seeks to remediate this ill on two fronts.

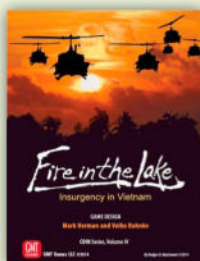
Firstly, this is a shiny fictional property. While fans of Robotech will find joy in seeing Rick Hunter and Minmei, even those unfamiliar with the setting will draw some relief from the detachment to modern turmoil. Fans of the *COIN* system will likewise find comforting familiarity, as the four factions map to recognisable archetypes such as the Robotech Defense and Expeditionary Forces mapping to the strained alliance of government and military factions in *Fire in the Lake*.

Robotech: Reconstruction's second trick is in fastidiously winnowing away at the *COIN* system. This is not an official entry in the series, coming from an altogether different publisher and making several large shifts in design, but it feels every bit a *COIN* game. However, it's much, much simpler. Factions are still entirely asymmetrical, but their unique actions can be described on a small player aid as opposed to a pamphlet. Rules surrounding which factions are eligible to act are more intuitive. The



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Game board
- ▶ 4 Faction boards
- ▶ 3 Tracking boards
- ▶ 4 Hero standees
- ▶ 54 Cards
- ▶ 120 Tokens



map itself is more straightforward, resembling traditional area control games to a large extent.

Facilitating much of the transition from historical political simulation to accelerated fictional joust, is an evolution on card play that is fantastic. Players are dealt event cards from a central deck, taking turns to play these dramatic effects. Much like *Twilight Struggle*, participants are forced into tough decisions as you will often play cards that boost your opponents. This places a magnification on the game state, requiring a sharp eye to identify opportunities to elicit favours and manipulate the political climate. It creates a tense network of fragile alliances and bitter aggression. It's the essence of *Robotech: Reconstruction*.

This atmosphere is enhanced by the intriguing framing competition. There are two ways the game can end, either in decisive victory where one faction is crowned, or by going the distance of four rounds and resulting in a tallying of points where two separate players are awarded a minor victory. Due to the relatively concise playtime and rapid pace of play, it feels as if everyone is always within a single move of finding total victory. It requires players to plot against the leader, combining efforts to twist the knife and throw everything off balance.

The structure of semi-formal alliances only heightens the strain. Due to how the unique faction incentives and abilities are set up, there is a natural duality of two versus two. The military factions will work together to suppress the political activism of the Anti-Unification League, as well as smash the will of the Zentraedi Rebellion. There's a strategic complexity in untangling the implications here, but there's a general reliance on teamwork to pull off the larger and more devastating offensives on offer.

But often the game will end in a dramatic surprise, one player seizing control and accomplishing their faction specific victory condition. So you're placed in this awkward yet delightful position of working with another player while also keeping an eye on their progress. Provide too much aid and you may seal your own fate. Not enough and your primary foe will win. It's wonderful.

This is a fascinating game that fulfills its promise. It is unfortunate that the physical production is so meager, garish, and simply not up to the same quality. This is a bigger problem than you may initially realise, as the cluttered view can often result in an opaque gamestate that will slow play and have participants constantly recounting units and rethinking strategy. But this flawed demerit is not significant enough to overshadow the immense design underneath the jumble. *Robotech: Reconstruction* is a fantastic experience, and one that builds atop its influence in a substantial way. ●

CHARLIE THEEL

PLAY IT? YES

This is a very dramatic, wild ride that leverages politicking to produce a rich area-control experience.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED FIRE IN THE LAKE...

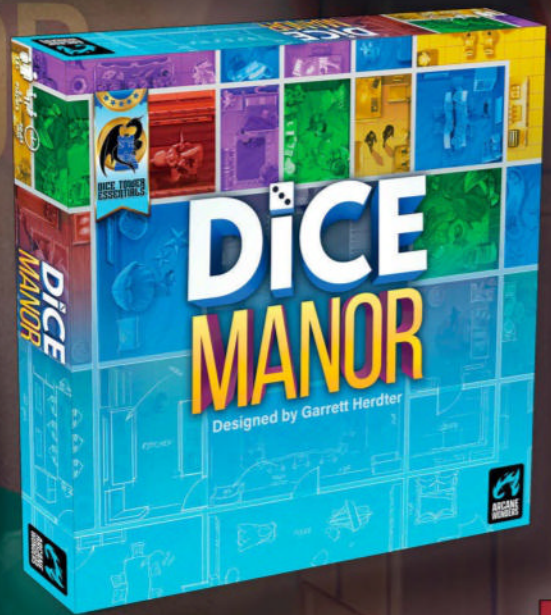
Heavily influenced by *COIN*, this leans into the soft-alliance structure of that seminal title with a reduced complexity and playtime.



Build the most lavish home ever imagined!

Roll your dice, compete for the best rooms,
advertise and give the best Grand Tour!

Who will create the most magnificent Dice Manor?



www.ArcaneWonders.com

WHAT'S IN A GAME? BOARD OF EDUCATION

We all know games are good for us, but in what way? Each month Tim Clare untangles the science and philosophy behind what makes games good

Words by **Tim Clare**

Recently I went with my daughter to a workshop about educational science boardgames. A games designer had worked with various researchers studying topics as varied as AI learning and genetics, then turned their research into tabletop games. The idea of the project was to create a fun new way to raise awareness of the research going on all the time in our universities, and teach some of the basic ideas to a non-expert audience.

I love tabletop games with a zeal that makes people back away from me at parties. And I rarely go to parties in the first place because they get in the way of valuable cardboard time. I also feel passionately about the value of scientific research. We've made incredible strides in public health, information technology and our understanding of how the universe works, and any project that demystifies the process, and encourages us all to participate, is axiomatically a Good Thing.

So it's a bit inconvenient that the games were bad. And when I say bad, I mean really bad. Almost unplayably so.

There's a bit at the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey* where the protagonist has been placed in a habitat created by aliens. There's a bookshelf, with books on it. He goes to take one down from the shelf and... it's fake. The 'books' are just empty simulacra that you can't open. The aliens have clearly observed bookshelves in images, but they don't understand what a book is *for*.

I was reminded of this moment while 'playing' the science 'games'. (I've made a point of not including any details that might identify when and where I tried them, as I don't want the people involved to feel bad – I'm sure they did their best and, as I've said, I think the intent is noble, despite the execution) Yes, there were dice, cards, sometimes a central board. But the actual gameplay loops – the point of our getting round the table in the first place – ranged between incomprehensible and dire.

Roll some dice. If you get enough of a particular symbol you can ask another player a question. Then take a card from the deck in the centre. Why are you doing this? What relation does it bear to the scientists' research? Even the volunteers involved in demonstrating the games were stumped and apologetic.

And this is troubling, because by far the biggest area in boardgame research – or, more properly, the most frequent reason for the inclusion of tabletop games in academic papers – is using games as educational tools. Clearly, at some point, people got the idea that a

boardgame would be a good mechanism for teaching certain audiences about particular subjects – perhaps because using a 'game' format makes it seem less onerous than a series of lectures or making people read pamphlets. I suspect boardgames have an edge because it's theoretically easier to design a physical game than it is to code a digital one. (Although there is plenty of research using online games, too).

Thus you'll find papers on using boardgames to teach teenagers about sexual health, junior doctors about medical hygiene, and the general public about climate change, to name but a few. In each study, the authors use a game designed as an educational tool – sometimes specifically created for that study – ask various groups to play it, then test their knowledge of the subject in question using various metrics.

Generally, these studies report positive outcomes. A 2021 study that used a boardgame to teach participants about climate change, for example, found that playing the game was as effective as reading an article about climate change in terms of short-term learning, but that the game had more 'stickiness' when it came to 'long-term retention of new information'. Participants given a survey four weeks later remembered more about climate change if they'd played the game versus those who had simply read an article.

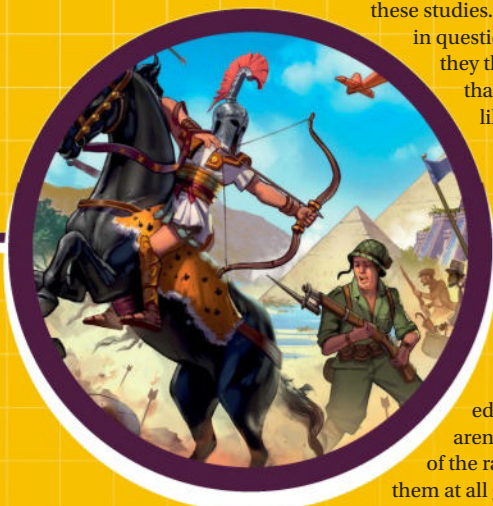
We should be cautious of many of these studies' findings for a few reasons: firstly, they involve small samples. For example, the above study had a total cohort of 41 participants, split into the





'boardgame' and 'control' groups, meaning only about 20 people played the game. These 20 were a 'convenience sample' rather than a true cross-section of the population, recruited via social media and through the private research company's (who conducted the research) internal database. In other words, they may not accurately represent all the people who might try to use boardgames to learn something new.

But the biggest issue, for me at least, as a player, is one that is rarely seriously assessed in these studies. Are the games in question good? Are they the sorts of games that people are likely to want to play, of their own volition, outside of volunteering for a study in which playing the game is a condition of participation?



Because if educational games aren't fun, then 90% of the rationale for using them at all goes down the swanny. Yes, a few studies – such

as the 2021 climate change boardgame study – look at how well people learn compared to traditional educational methods, but most just test whether they know more post-game than before playing it. If the games are a chore, it would be more



efficient to just get people to read a textbook.

Based on my recent experience, the description of the games in the studies – which are often roll-and-move trivia-style games, or simple set collection card games – and the fact that experienced game designers are rarely involved in their creation, I feel confident in suggesting that a lot of them aren't going to be very entertaining.

And that's a shame – a real shame – because we can immediately point to examples of games within the hobby that tell a great story and could be used as educational aids. Uwe Rosenberg's *Attiwa*, a game about creating sustainable ecosystems that can support fruit bats and families in Ghana, is both fun – albeit not Rosenberg's best – and educational. You can even order a separate book explaining the natural science and communities it's based on.

Genotype is a terrific eurogame that explores Mendelian genetics as players plant wrinkly and smooth peas and observe the heritable traits that result. What about history? Games like *Tammany Hall* and *Chinatown* are great thematic introductions to learning about immigration to New York in the middle of the 19th Century and the latter half of the 1960s respectively. *Twilight Struggle* recreates the Cold War and contains in its manual an explanation of every historical event referenced on the cards. Simple bidding games offer great opportunities for discussing Nash Equilibria and the likely outcomes of different strategies.

Perhaps the big failing of most research into the educational value of games is the attempt to design special, extra-educational titles. Instead, we might better look at the ways in which games already educate, while captivating and inspiring, and ask ourselves how we can use them – not as delivery systems for information – but as jumping off points for further exploration. Now you've tried your hand at finding habitats for birds, shall we visit a reserve so we can see some in real life? Now we've fought as the Houses of York and Lancaster, do you want to hear what happened at the real Battle of Bosworth Field?

Tabletop games – ones that are actually fun – provide a magic ingredient so many educators forget. They say to players: *this topic is cool – here's why*. Make that case, and learning is almost inevitable. ♣



“ If educational games aren't fun, then 90% of the rationale for using them at all goes down the swanny ”

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

Old school extravagance

Designer: Joseph Goodman | Publisher: Goodman Game



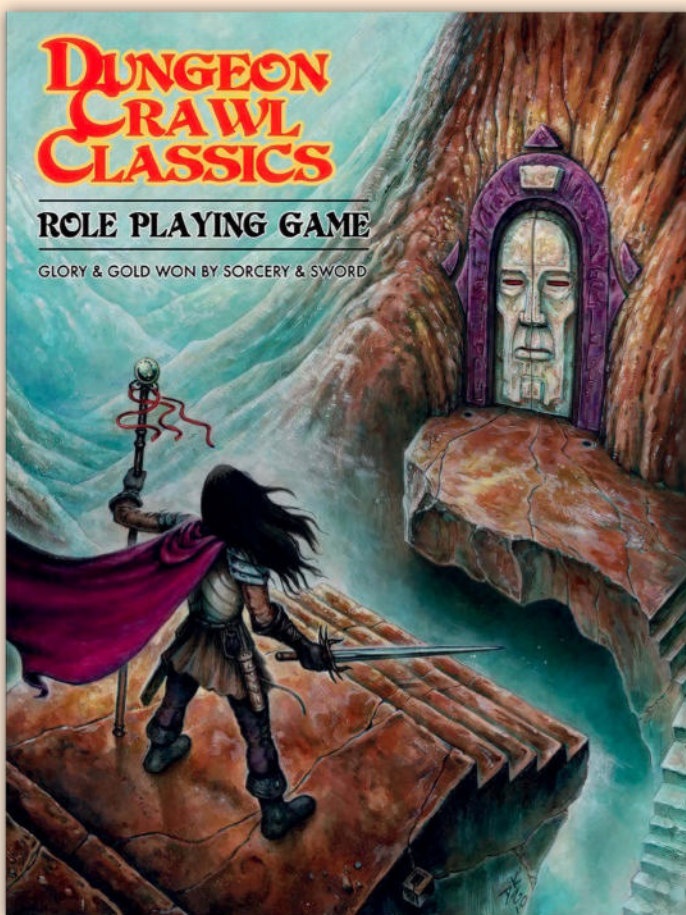
From the instant you lay your eyes on this book, you know what you're getting into. It's inch-and-a-half thick with three bookmark ribbons, and the cover is a vivid gouache painting of a warrior staring across an impassable chasm at a forbidding stone door. *Dungeon Crawl Classics* is excessive. Do you like *Dungeons & Dragons*? What if there was more? More dice, more spells, more characters! It oozes confidence.

The rules that power *DCC* should be familiar to anyone who has played *D&D* in the past 20 years. It takes the *Third Edition* engine and crams it into a van with a wizard airbrushed on the side. The core mechanics of the game fit comfortably on just one of the book's 500 pages, and the rest is content.

Over a third of this book is dedicated to spells, but there's no complicated magic system you need to learn here. No, instead *DCC* gives every single spell from Animal Summoning to Wizard Sense at least a page of possible results. Roll 34 or higher on your simple Knock spell and you might find yourself forcing everything even metaphorically locked to burst open for miles around. Windows and doors, of course, but also wine bottles, shoelaces, and belt buckles.

Wait, rolling a 34? That's right! In that same spirit of excess, *Dungeon Crawl Classics* will occasionally call you to roll a d7, or a d24, or even a d30 if the wind is blowing particularly in your favour. Wizards can also spend their stat points to increase their spellcheck modifier! For when you absolutely need to make sure your fireball kills absolutely everything, you can sell your soul to a demon and unleash hell.

The other innovation here is in character creation. Characters are created as randomly as possible; 3d6 down the line no re-rolls and no rearranging. The book is very insistent



of expendable lads are thrown into the meat-grinder and, by some combination of planning and luck, one of them survives? That's a character you are already invested in! That character gets the honour of graduating to level 1 and picking a class, and a newly minted adventuring party is organically born.

There's a lot to like between the covers of *Dungeon Crawl Classics*, but it's not all perfect. It's stuffed to the brim with classic feeling fantasy art, but that art misses about as often as it hits; for every gorgeous Peter Mullen ink drawing there's a cringy comic about an orc with huge boobs. The tone of the writing can also be a bit off-putting; the book starts with a list of "qualifications" you must possess before going any further. It feels like it's calling me a fake gamer girl at the jump and it sucks.

That's the kind of thing that kept me away from this book for years, and honestly that's a shame because I love *Dungeon Crawl Classics*. Luckily, the latest printing of the softcover has made a move towards gender neutral language, which is a massive positive step, and I think

the next printing of the hardback will have the same. Each day I spend with *DCC*, I inch closer and closer to making it my entire personality. So put on your best Hawkwind t-shirt, grab your d30 and get in this slightly janky wizard van with me. ●

ROZ LEAHY

PLAY IT? YES

It's a massive book full of both style and substance, and huge catalog of adventures will keep you satisfied for years.

on this point. But this is *DCC*, so you don't get just one character, you get four. *Dungeon Crawl Classics* is the home of the "funnel" adventure; a deathtrap-filled obstacle course full of insurmountable odds designed to kill as many characters as possible. This might sound like something out of a reddit post about a nightmare DM, but it's actually a bit of a magic trick.

For a start, it makes it so that playing the game happens as quickly as possible, no time is wasted. But then, when your own personal army



TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

With Wizards of the Coast's latest missteps with the OGL, I know there are a lot of people looking for a new way to play the game that they love. If that's you, I think you could do a lot worse than *DCC*.



A Punky Take on A Punky Genre

Designer: Christian Sahlen | Publisher: Free League



If there's any genre born to explore the bright, bloody aesthetic of *Mork Borg* and its cohort of doom-laden followers, it's cyberpunk. Anyone hungry for proof of this need look no further than *Cy_Borg's* ability to use its artsy progenitor as a jumping-off point for both slick visuals and solid gameplay.

In case the name didn't make it quite obvious enough, *Cy_Borg* is a cyberpunk take on *Mork Borg's* own stripped-down blend of old-school dungeon crawling and punky sensibilities. Beyond the black-and-neon colour palette, this lineage reveals itself in the game's simple rules, brutal combat, and love of random tables - used to determine everything from a character's backstory to the details of the crew's next job.

As a default, the game sets itself in the burned-out heart of a sprawling metropolis that feels akin to the mutated consequences of a drunken dalliance between Stockholm and Los Angeles. The players take the role of teched-out misfits struggling to survive in a city where corrupt corporate high-rises overlook irradiated ruins ruled by death cults and nanomachine-infested monsters. Unreliable contacts send them on heists and hits that are as dangerous as they are lucrative, with most ending in either shootout or a clash with security software that can fry the character's brains from the inside out.

If it wasn't already obvious, *Cy_Borg* leans heavily on cyberpunk's

many tropes and clichés. Its one real claim to a unique identity lies in its unerringly bleak outlook on things - the world is constantly teetering on the verge of apocalypse - but even this is hardly fresh territory for the famously skeptical genre.

Rather than being a mark against the game, however, the trope-laden nature of its setting actually plays a key role in making it work as well as it does.

The reason for this lies in the game's fundamental approach to playing. *Cy_Borg* isn't the kind of RPG you spend weeks prepping for, building up complex backstories tied into a carefully plotted campaign. Rather, it's a game you keep tucked into your backpack alongside a photocopied character sheet and a handful of biros, ready to break out at a moment's notice. It's the kind of thing you can pull out at the pub and be playing before the first pints are finished, and the vaguely-defined, "You've seen *Blade Runner*, right?" setting helps make that flow.

This is aided by a ruleset that is always looking to simplify and streamline. Rolls are handled without the need for skill bonuses or floating modifiers, and combat is as quick and brutal as a punch to the gut. Every single rule in the book is precise and simple enough to be understood at a glance - there's almost no risk of getting bogged down in discussions over interpretation or grey areas.

The same, of course, could probably be said of *Mork Borg*. However, where *Mork Borg* was arguably an artistic

statement that happened to take the form of an RPG, its cyberpunk spawn is a little more grounded in the idea that people might actually play it.

Make no mistake, *Cy_Borg* is still a prime example of rules-light gaming, but not to the extent that it becomes rules-effervescent. The hacking system, for example, has a surprising amount of depth and room for considered decision-making, with different cyber-apps unlocking different powers that can turn a heist on its head.

This comparatively deep approach design bleeds over to the world-building as well. The rulebook devotes real effort to sketching out its miserable, rad-soaked setting, and while this never gets close to anything concrete there are still a few crumbling bones you can jump off for your own game. You even get a scraggly kind of map at the very front of the tome - par for the course in most games, but a generous gesture in a title inspired by *Mork Borg*.

The result is a really rather special little game - one light enough to slip in a pocket, but with a real commitment to delivering satisfying gameplay as well as aesthetics. It succeeds in delivering an authentically cyberpunk-ish feel without the need for all the weapon catalogues and byzantine hacking rules that can make so many of its contemporaries utterly incomprehensible. ●

RICHARD JANSEN-PARKES

PLAY IT? YES

Bright, brutal, beautiful. Buy it.



TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED CYBERPUNK RED

If you love the genre and don't mind a few clichés, *Cy_Borg* is well worth a gander



THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF THE DARK FUTURE

**REAL TIME
DICE-ROLLING COMBAT!**

**STAR FIGHTERS
RAPID FIRE**

RRP
£24.99

Race to place cats in this sequel to smash hit Kittin'!

CATSTRAUTS

RRP
£12.99

An economic eurogame by Fabio Lopiano & Nestore Mangone

AUTOBAHN

RRP
£59.99

AVAILABLE NOW!

FROM APRIL 4
TO APRIL 26

20% OFF ALL

DUNGEON FIGHTER

PRODUCTS!

FREE EXCLUSIVE PROMO*

WITH EACH ORDER
INCLUDING A
DUNGEON FIGHTER
PRODUCT!
*while stocks last

Get it on our
ONLINE SHOP!

HORRIBLEGUILD.COM

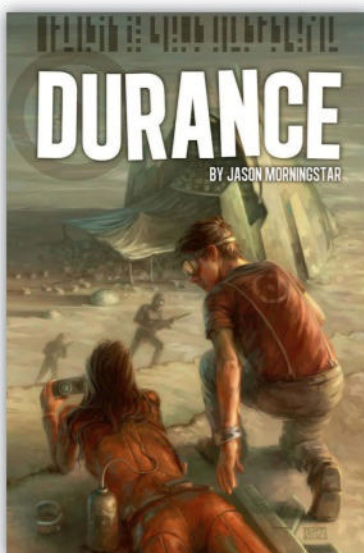


DURANCE

Designer: Bully Pulpit Games | **Publisher:** Jason Morningstar



Science fiction gives us a lens through which to view reality and come to conclusions unadulterated by our usual preconceptions and *Durance* by Jason Morningstar provides exactly that. The premise of the game is that the worst criminal scum from a dozen star systems have been dumped on a remote prison planet where they are expected to build a new civilisation under the watchful eye of the Authority. Sound familiar? Well, don't worry if it doesn't because *Durance* does well to explain at the end of the book that this is a sci-fi reimagining of the first European prison colonies in Australia and even explains that the sci-fi coating can be



rubbed off to play a historical setting of the first such colony.

Durance itself is a GM-less RPG which means that all of the players are on equal footing though one player will take on a semi-formal role as The Guide, purely because they're the ones who know the rules. From the get-go, players work together to pick what is important to their prison colony, what the planet they're on is like, and what they need. This handy bit of collaborative generation is reminiscent of *Paris Gondo* and *the Life Saving Magic of Inventorying* and means that there are 20 possible planets,

providing plenty of replayability. After you've generated the planet

and the colony's needs, each player gets the chance to create two characters. One on the side of the Authority and one inmate. The clever bit of ruling here is that you can't have two characters at the same rung of the hierarchy so that one power hungry friend can't be both the Governor and the Dimber Damber... the strangely named head of the inmates.

Durance could be a great starting point for players who are new to the concept of a GM-less RPG as it provides a decent framework and an expansive example of play that shows how the various scenes might play out. The somewhat grim setting may put some people off and will require some careful navigation to not become uncomfortable. ●

ANNA BLACKWELL

PLAY IT? MAYBE

BOX OF ADVENTURE: COAST OF DREAD

Designer: Loke Battlemats | **Publisher:** Loke Battlemats



Loke have been making excellent maps with the world's most popular roleplaying game in mind for some time now, so you know you're in safe hands when you crack open the magnetic claps on this horrors-on-the-coast themed box.

Inside there's a ton (some three hundred-odd) of cut out tokens (pleasingly old school) and 24 battle maps, which come in the usual and very useful wipe-clean format. These maps fold out and can be arranged for any number of seaside encounters, trips to the graveyard, or a bit of light dungeon crawling. As this adventure set is designed to work together it all flows really nicely, and most of the time you're going to have everything you need for mucking about with monsters with a sea view.

More importantly though the included *Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition* adventure *Curse of the Dread*

Marsh Crew is actually in itself an extremely good entry point into playing *D&D*, especially for game masters. See it not only gives you all the rules you actually need to have a good time, but also clearly sets out encounters, traps and everything else you just *want* to have when you're first learning how to run roleplaying games. The pre-generated characters are super charming too, taking all of the 'what do I do?' overload out of a first game. Literally having 'Roll 1d20' next to saving throws and skills is going to chill anyone out who was worried about how it all works.

The adventure itself focuses around a curse, The Black Hand, which even has a little 'how cursed are you' meter for players to fill out as they succumb. It also has an amusing undead player mechanic for when they do 'turn'.

Brilliant value for the start of a campaign, and massive utility



beyond that. If you're thinking about getting into roleplaying for the swashbuckling, then this is a great starting point. ●

CHRISTOPHER JOHN EGGETT

PLAY IT? MUST-PLAY

MIRU

Scribble your way out of this one!

Designer: Hinokodo | Publisher: Mimic Publishing Collective



Can you kill a god? Is it worth a punt? That is the question of this exiting little book of hex-scribbling and dice rolling.

Miru is a small indie analogue adventure with some really quite big ideas within. We often talk about the ability of little solo adventure games to pack a much bigger punch than we expected because of the way they light-up your imaginative landscape when playing them. It's often about the idea that this is a tool for cracking open some of your own creative potential in an ad-libbing, unexpected way.

That isn't the case here. What we have instead is something entirely different. Something... cinematic.

It's 100 years in the future and your brother was just killed by a robot. You've decided to kill god as a sensible and measured reaction to this grief and loss. This anime-esque set-up is less bombastic feeling the more you explore the (very well written) world of *Miru*. As you explore the tone shifts from 'why are these robots here?' to a Children of Men or The Last of Us feeling of a sad but not always truly evil, world.

Your quest to kill the robot god – the thing that is to blame for the death of your brother, as, after all, the robots must be doing the bidding of this creature – comes in the form of exploring the world around you until you encounter it. Like nearly all mapping games, when you start out, you don't know how you're going to complete your mission, but you're best of strike out on a course anyway and hoping for the best.

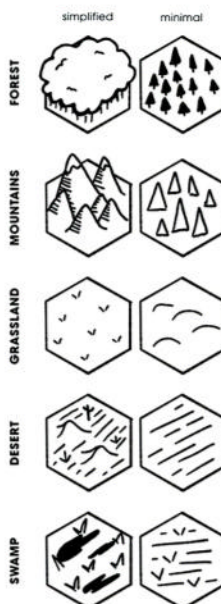
The game asks you to roll biomes and events for location, each written in a kind of languishing fallen-America style (a little bit sad the world is over, sort of happy not to be at work), and asks you to spend food and resources to survive. Sometimes you'll run into a natural encounter (a bear!) or into something tougher (a big robot!) and this might be the end of you. Your scribbles soon add up to



HOW TO MARK YOUR MAP:

Before you end each day, you should update your map (and your journal) so you don't forget or lose track of the happenings around you.

Feel free to draw however you want. We have provided a few examples for the terrains and icons that make for a great finished map.



ICONS:

Sometimes you're going to want to mark your map with more information than just the terrain.



TREASURE VILLAGE IMPASSABLE

NUMBERS



You may find multiple villages or treasures. Use numbers to tell them apart.

GOD RELATED EVENTS:

Count the days of your journey. At the beginning of your day, if it corresponds with a God Event, go to page 20-21 to see what occurs. You should mark these tiles with icons.



Optional: Write a one sentence summary of each day in a journal. Your notes make for great memories.

05

a world that seems natural enough – and definitely hexcrawl-worthy.

More interestingly is how the calendar works, every day is marked off as you would expect, and when you hit certain days, a god event happens. These events are special and often require changing the map in some way. They feel like the backbone of the story, and give the whole thing that cinematic feel.

The places you visit on your journey aren't always empty too. This isn't a totally dead world, just one that's been flattened a little. Sometimes you're too late to help, sometimes

you're admonished by your elders. Either way the place feels alive not in an a totally organic sense, but more like in a videogame where you run into a different character at the same location at different times of day. For all that, it's a great entry into the world of surviving-and-drawing-your-way-to-victory. ●

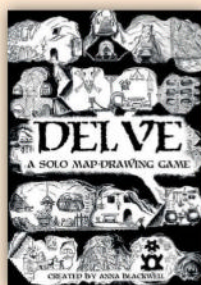
CHRISTOPHER JOHN EGGETT

PLAY IT? YES

This map-making adventure through a new world is in parts an abstract game of locations, and part exploration. Cinematic with a little crunch. Brilliant.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED DELVE...

Like to scribble your way to victory? Then *Miru* is a good place to emerge after you've managed to drown all of your dwarves in *Delve*.





DUNGEONS DROP - DROP 1

A good opportunity to dig too deep

Designer: Chris Bissette | Publisher: Loot The Room



There's a certain subset of RPG gamers who just absolutely live for dungeons. They are an easy breed to spot; do they, near exclusively, call the person running the game the "DM"? The Dungeon Master. They'll never use a term like "Games Master" or the "referee", but solely preferring a title that honours the true pursuit, that of completing the Dungeon.

I'm aware of it, because I'll admit a sort of fascinated bemusement with the attraction. I enjoy pretty much all 'theatre of the mind', many systems and styles of roleplay, but when I hear of groups exploring a thousand room megadungeon? I wonder slightly where the appeal is. At what point do they stop being, you know, just rooms? Room after room after room.

Happily for the hobby, there are many people who *do* understand the drive to delve, and perhaps few are as well versed in these dark arts as Chris Bissette, host of the *Adventure Tourism* podcast, where they regularly interview notable designers about adventure modules that have inspired and influenced them.

The *Dungeons Drop* is an homage to the art, the love and the pursuit of dungeon diving, and it does it in a format friendly to the casual caver or the hardcore hollow hound. It comes in a lovely matt book, with gold foil on the case, and a layer of foam on the inside that makes it feel like you are opening a valuable jewellery haul. Underneath are enough dungeons to keep Gimli happy.

They come in two formats. Firstly, five traditional tri-fold pamphlet modules, each with an appropriately morbid title. You have *The Lair of the Silent Lord*, *the grasping tunnels*, *Stone Secrets*, *The Grotesque God* and *The Forbidden Blade* to choose from. A immediate concern could be that this is all just the same idea repeated; that's not the case. *The Grotesque God* is a framework for building a monstrous Deity on the fly, *Stone Secrets* has a loose map, but mostly provides a world for its protagonist to lurk in, whilst *the grasping tunnels* provides a tunnel-crawl full of fearsome hands and arms. Lots of ideas, lots of interesting ways to die.

The A5 booklets are much more substantial, each strong enough to be

a full standalone adventure in their own right. *Beyond the Drowned Spire* involves underwater adventuring, with its intentional limitations on movement, communication, vision and oxygen. It uses a large, blocky map, that breaks open section-by-section to reveal the rooms within, which is a helpful way to allow the overall world to be visualised more easily without losing the specifics that you'll need for play. *Bodies in Flight* is a cavern crawl underneath a very well fleshed-out village, one where the dragons on the cliff-tops are rumoured to be tame and highly trained (false), and not all the entrances to the caves are known by the villagers (true). Finally, *Vine Heart* reveals a forgotten forest, filled with forgotten words and possessed by a forgotten god.

All of this is system-neutral, designed to fit into any game system of your choosing, especially those of the *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Old School Revival* genre. As such, there are few character stats or specific rulings, just keywords such as skeletons or bears. The DM can swap in the appropriate monster for their setting here (or something inappropriate). For those without a system in mind, Chris even offers a completely free rules-lite system for exactly this purpose, the innovatively named *a dungeon game*, available in print or for free on his website.

The box-set is illustrated, a little bare-bones at some points, but also enough to drop in flavour. The aesthetic of mould, decay and darkness is present throughout, with each game looking quite different, yet also obviously sitting as part of a set very comfortably. For those who love dungeons, *The Dungeons Drop* will not disappoint. ●

CHRIS LOWRY

PLAY IT? YES

If your adventuring party is in need of more escapades, underwhelming treasures and life-ending monsters, look no further than the *Dungeons Drop*.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

- ▶ Presentation box
- ▶ Certificate of Authenticity
- ▶ 5 tri-fold dungeon leaflets
- ▶ 3 A5 perfect-bound dungeon booklets

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED THE BLACK HACK

...A focus is shared here on low complexity rules and the gameplay being the point of the whole endeavour. You could also comfortably run everything inside the *Dungeons Drop* using the Black Hack rules set.





with liberal use of make-up and prosthetics. All of these are very cool ways to approach the story and I especially liked the implied non-lethality of using the disguise skill. All these powers are equally as strong, so the real skill here for beating the game (with a decent score, getting a bad one isn't that hard) comes from your judge of character.

See, not everything is as it seems – the answers aren't always totally obvious for each criminal you track down, and your own history with them will come into play. Your ability to properly read the image,



TEARS OF A GODDESS

Hide and seek and murder

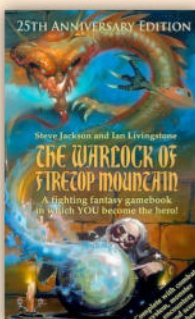
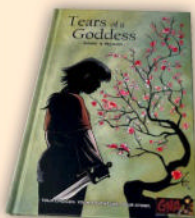
Designer: Jurdic & Manuro | Publisher: Van Ryder Games



The Graphic Novel Adventure series of books by Van Ryder are often known for their surprisingly complexity compared to the simplest of choose-your-path adventures. There's often a dice-rolling or disc-spinning component to complete tests. One even has you building an entire town and managing its resources. Another asks you to take your character from one book to the next, retaining your items and skills.

Tears of the Goddess isn't one of those. It's one of the classic entries in the series that focuses on exploring the book against the in-game time constraint. Yes there's a bit of health and equipment tracking, but it's not something where you really need a character sheet (although there is, of course, one included).

We play the role of a young bounty hunter in a non-specific oriental world. Your journey begins in the gardens of the city's temple, where



a crime has been committed. Three criminals have stolen The Tears of Nūwa – a divine plant that is not only valuable, but is key to the continued survival of the city. You are tasked with getting these precious plants back.

But it's not that simple, your life is somewhat intertwined with these characters, and the city doesn't easily yield its secrets to you. You'll need to take your best skills along with you, and plan your approach accordingly.

Here you come surprisingly well armed, some butterfly blade, some poisons and a skillset of your choice. That might be weapon throwing for tackling enemies and encounters from a distance, burglary for a slight-of-hand and lockpicking adventure, or becoming a master of disguise

the body language of the situation you're in and make the right call is the key to winning here. This is one of the few times that we've really found the graphic novel style to lend itself *this* well to the choices that you need to make. The fact you're picking up stuff from the attitudes of characters is really a triumph of the form.

So then, if you're looking for an adventure that asks you to fully engage, as much as understand the mechanics, this is a great way to start. ●

CHRISTOPHER JOHN EGGETT

PLAY IT? YES

One of the most straightforward of the Graphic Novel Adventure series out there, and brilliant for it. A great entry point with plenty of choice and replayability.

TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED FIGHTING FANTASY...

If you're into choosing how you adventure, then this is a great, graphical, step to take.

ULTRAVIOLET GRASSLANDS AND THE BLACK CITY

What a trip...

Designer: Luka Rejec | Publisher: Exalted Funeral



I've long held it to be true that the platonic ideal of a roleplaying game campaign is one where you or your players intend to go and do something important but get side tracked immediately. *Ultraviolet Grasslands* is an intentional attempt at this – or at least, that's what it feels like from the outside.

The book is primarily a collection of 32 locations for adventurers to explore. All of them are weird, some of them are deadly, but most importantly they're all very intriguing. *UVG* is a kind of 'tourism simulator' for an extremely weird world – and we mean this in the best possible way.

The structure of the adventure is inspired by the Oregon Trail (a videogame most notable for being available in America high school computer labs, and therefore in all popular culture). As such it's a kind of choose-your-path point crawl, a skinny line that offers 'high road/ low road' choices as you travel from the starting location of the Violet City toward Black City on the edge of the world. Getting there is a matter of keeping track of resources, talking to the right people, and not getting too sidetracked by the ... is that a glass bridge I see over there? Shall we go have a look? We've got time right... That's very much what the game's about. See cool stuff covered in



glinting gold, space age mauve, electric skies and so on. Fix the problems of a local ghost community. Get into a fight into a bar (there's a dedicate carousing system). It's a bit messy how everything comes together, but it all gels on the 'vibes' of the book. Even experience uses a 'wonder' system, where players can just look at something cool and get a benefit. If you've looked in wonder at the cover here and thought it looked like a cool place you'd want to go, then

you're sold – go get it.

There is the question of the system that comes packed within the book. Rejec seems to have hidden it deep within the book as a kind of 'back up' for whatever system you'd like to use. It turns up on page 134 and is presented in a kind of 'hey, use it if you must' kind of way, as if the designer is worried it's not good enough. Yet it's a good, light D20 system with some exploding dice and a casual approach to difficulty. Monsters are crunched down to a single level-equals-stats system. Player damage is about an accumulation of fatigue, every time you would die in any other game you add a tick to the fatigue track on the sheet. This represents the grind of the open road as your character goes from grumpy, to half speed to comatose.

UVG is flavour with hidden substance. If you want a rollicking adventure that feels like Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy meets Dune meets the Oregon Trail, then this is *the one*.
CHRISTOPHER JOHN EGGETT

PLAY IT? MUST-PLAY

Ultraviolet Grasslands is an amazing setting, adventure, and even system (if you can find it). Heading in to the grasslands is about wonder, strangeness and oddities – and you don't even have to look that hard for it.



TRY THIS IF YOU LIKED TROIKA!...

Like things weird? Then the Black City beckons! And if you want to keep the *Troika!* system while you do it you'll feel right at home.



WHAT'S IN YOUR ATTIC?

MONOPOLY: STAR WARS LIMITED COLLECTOR'S ED

Each month we explore our reader's attics to find long forgotten gaming gems

Words and Interview by **Christopher John Eggett**

Did you know there's more than one version of Monopoly? While I wait for you to retrieve your copy of *My Front Room Monopoly* to throw at me, I'll also let you know there's at least 15 different versions of Star Wars Monopoly too – at least according to a cursory glance at the listicles on the internet. With that, it's the perfect way to kick off our new monthly segment that looks at the nostalgic thrill of digging through the weird stuff you've shoved in the attic because it might be worth a few quid in the future.

The game is of course, 'just *Monopoly*', but it came with some nice additions for Star Wars fans. For example, instead of the usual boot, hat, dog etc we have Leia, Han Solo, Chewbacca and so on. There's some brass, or brass effect, 'imperial coins' and instead of houses and hotels, there's TIE-fighters, Corellian Freighters (i.e. Han Solo's ship) and Star Destroyers. More amusingly is *Monopoly*'s greatest contribution to the world of gaming, which is paper money. Here the credits you use are printed in the usual denominations, but with some Aurebesh writing on them – for which there's even a handy translation guide included. Likely a terrible game, but a great collector's item.



Hello! Can you introduce yourself to our readers?

I'm Ben, I live in Kimberley just outside Nottingham and have been playing modern board games for about ten years now. For nine of those years I've kept a blog going on BoardGameGeek called "Sneaky Meeples", and in January 2022 me and another local gamer set up a weekly game night at a local pub (The Royal Oak, Watnall). While I'm happy to play anything once, over the years I've tended towards more historical themed games. Current favourites are *Tank Duel*, *Enemy in the Crosshairs*, *Obsession*, *Brass: Lancashire* and *1944: Race to the Rhine*. I've always kept a slim collection, I'm quite happy to trade or sell games that I don't like or don't get played, so very little actually ends up in my attic!

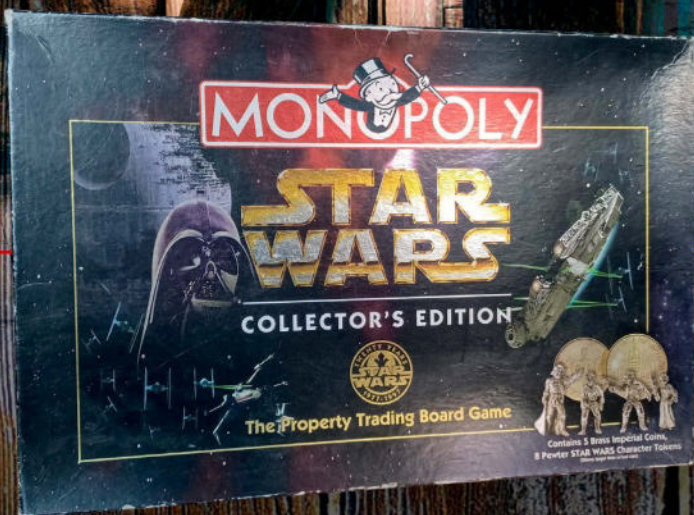
What game have you found in your attic?

So they're not currently in my attic because I moved house last year, but stashed up there were *Pandemic Legacy Season 1*, *King's Dilemma* and *Monopoly: Star Wars Limited Collector's Edition*. Pandemic and King's Dilemma I've played through and kept because I want to use the components to make a collage to display on the wall of my games room.

Monopoly: Star Wars Limited Collector's Edition is the Waddington's 1997 edition. Pewter player markers (Luke, Leia, Han, Chewie, R2, Vader, Boba Fett and Generic Stormtrooper) and half a dozen brass coins to count as £1000. Or galactic credits, whatever the currency is! Instead of hotels you put down a Star Destroyer or YT-1300/Millennium Falcon. Its in pretty good condition, but then again it's either been sat in the loft or on a corner of the games shelf for years.



ITION



Release date:
1996

Publisher:
Waddingtons

Still Available New?:
No

Second hand:
Readily Available

Price:
£18-70 depending
on condition

Whose was it? Who bought it for you (if not you)?

I think it was a Christmas present from my parents, either 1997 or 1998 when the remastered Star Wars films were all released at cinemas.

Needless to say I really got into Star Wars, I remember having the Kenner TIE Fighter model where the wings popped off, loads of Star Wars die-casts and I couldn't begin to count the hours spent playing X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter on PC.

Can you remember how it work and how it plays?

Of course, it's just basic *Monopoly*! The only difference I can think of is that, if you're being proper about it, anyone using a light-side character should use the X-Wings and Falcons for their houses and hotels, while any dark-side players use the TIE Fighters and Star Destroyers. And there's the brass coins for £1000. That said, I don't I remember ever playing *Monopoly* by the rules as written. We had all the usual house rules like money on Free Parking, forgetting about auctioning properties and mortgaging. When you learn *Monopoly* as a kid you don't know how these things work so parents leave them out.

Tell us about any specific memories you might have of playing with it?

R2-D2 was (and still is) my favourite character so I always had to play as R2. Most games always went the same way, my dad would buy stuff rather recklessly and end up going out first, leaving just me and Mum to play for hours to reach a conclusion.

What do you think of it now?

The same as almost all people who have been exposed to modern board games, that *Monopoly* is clearly a very dated design, filled with inherent flaws, too random, and too long. That said, people make the *Monopoly* experience worse for themselves by using all those house rules (like money on Free Parking) so if you strip those out and play it properly as per the actual rules...it's not much better but it won't last for hours! In 2019 my parents, fiancé and I played the *Game of Thrones* version of *Monopoly* using the rules as written and it lasted bang on an hour, with my dad winning for once!

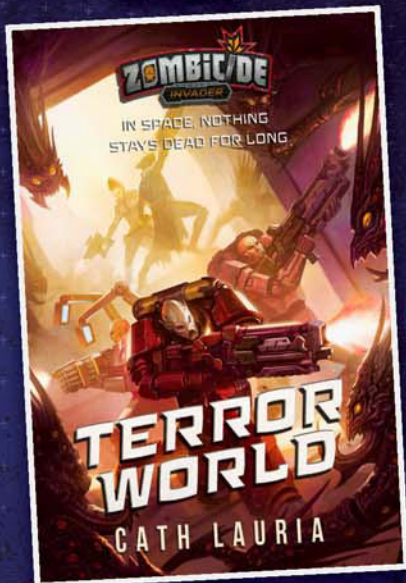
What do you wish you'd found in your attic instead?

There's a few games that I wish I'd stashed in the loft rather than trade or sell away. *Panamax* would be one, a really nice and chunky economy and cargo moving game that barely got played when I did own it, so it got traded away, but it would be a perfect fit for my weekly game night group. 🎲





SCI-FI MAYHEM IN A GALAXY OF KILLER SPACE ZOMBIES!!



A mysteriously dead world, an ancient alien spaceship filled with arcane tech, what could possibly go wrong? Newly resurrected and hungry undead swarm the expedition while an even greater threat to the universe lies in wait...



ALL AVAILABLE NOW FROM YOUR FRIENDLY LOCAL GAME STORE, GOOD BOOKSHOPS, AND ONLINE IN PAPERBACK, AUDIOBOOK & EBOOK

ACONYTEBOOKS.COM



WORLD EXPANDING FICTION

The Aconyte name and logo are registered or unregistered trademarks of Aconyte Entertainment Limited. © 2023 Aconyte. All rights reserved.

EPIC ENCOUNTERS

Nest of the Dinosaur



No Glue Required



Age 14+



Time 2-6 hours



Make your next RPG night one to remember with Epic Encounters.

100mm
Base



PRE-ORDER NOW!



Double-sided encounter map. Adventure book. Colossal Dinosaur miniature.

Copyright © Steamforged Games Ltd 2023. All Rights Reserved

Ask Ben

CAN'T TEACH WON'T TEACH

Each month our in-house agony aunt, Ben Maddox, answers your ludological lamentations

Words by **Ben Maddox**

Q. Dear Ben,

The 31st of December 1960. My, what a dark day in British history. Not only was it a day that was about to usher in one of the most sickly permissive decades in modern history but one of our great nation's grand institutions stopped. National Service. Ah, I remember, as a boy, watching columns of men, draped in the olive drab, parading through our village and feeling a swelling. A swelling of pride. That our bright shores were defended by these swarthy Tommies and all Mummy and me had to fear was the clotted cream going off.

What do we have now? A nation that even the dogs turn their noses up at. If the Prime Minister can't summon up enough British spunk to comb his hair then I don't know where we are (is it still that one? I rather lose track of these things).

Nowhere is this lack of duty and stiffness more apparent than at my weekly board gaming night. There are rules, both written and unwritten, that are simply not being followed. Please permit me to furnish you with one example.

If I buy a game, I take it home, I punch out the pieces, place them into bags that I have previously ironed (and don't tell me you can't iron polythene, you just don't have the back bone) and LEARN THE RULES! By the time it comes to gently lay the game on the table I am not only versed in the various mechanical interactions but also many of the basic heuristics and tactical manipulations required to play (and my fellow gamers are delighted by my light hearted "critiques" of their decisions).

The shower that I play with though. Yesterday, I got a text message, of all things, from one of my group asking me if I could learn the rules of a game they'd just bought because I was, and I quote, "good at it"! Now, truth of that statement aside, it is not my duty to learn THEIR game. "Delegation is dereliction" as the musky Sergeant Major used to say, and it is in his memory that I pen you this missive. Ben, you leonine, ludological legend, help me to inject some vim into my sorry troop and by so doing helping to make the nation hard again.

Yours,
Stolid

A. Dear Stolid,

Without discipline we are nothing. When the storm finally comes we must trust the plan. We ARE the plan. We can only achieve our ends by meticulous discipline, and drinking our own urine but I talk about that in my blog (itsjustlikesmellywater.edu).

You have fired up my blood! It feels so good to know that there are still pure souls out there willing to fight the good fight and stiffen themselves for what they believe in. You must be a

beacon. You must be the bulb that the weak moths flock to but rather than singe them you should use your bulbiness to educate them, to prepare them, to help them. I cannot help but disagree with your muscular Sergeant Major though. A real leader must delegate, must harness the strengths of others and, if the need is dire, steal loads of stuff off the internet.

Thankfully the internet is stuffed with the labour of others and their sweat is just a click away!

What you need is board game tutelage and I will recommend you some of the finest purveyors of this commodity in the world.

Firstly, there is the square jawed Canadian adonis, Rodney Smith. His hair is thick but his explanations are lean.

Then there's the glorious husband and wife team of Meeple University but you may have to flip the image to watch their videos.

Finally, there is the big daddy, the ruler of game clarification and the biggest owner

of blue and white shirts east of the Danube, Nithrania.

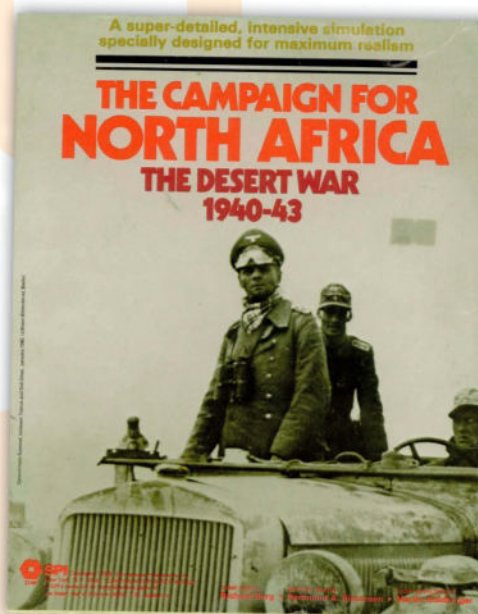
If you put yourself in the hands of these able interlocutors you can erect a game night you can be proud of. In fact, you may have the proudest erection in your whole area!

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to "pour" myself a drink.

**With all of my ludological love,
Ben**

Seeking guidance?

Have you got a gaming problem? Want Ben to dish out some ludological wisdom in your direction? Get in touch. Contact with Ben on Twitter [@5games4doomsday](https://twitter.com/5games4doomsday) or email the editor at christopher.eggett@warnersgroup.co.uk and we'll publish, and answer, the most amusing problems.



SCYTHE: EXPEDITIONS



TRAIL BLAZING

We jump into the Scythe universe once again for a new expedition...

Interview by **Richard Simpson**

When *Scythe* first came to our attention in 2016 on Kickstarter, it became one of the major success stories on the platform. In the years that followed Jamey Stegmaier, the owner and operator of Stonemaier Games, has moved away from crowdfunding completely and released a series of games that span a range of mechanics, from worker placement with *Viticulture* and *Charterstone* to one of his most successful titles *Wingspan* which to date has sold over 1 million copies. We recently caught up with Jamey to chat about his latest game, *Expeditions*, which takes place in the same universe as *Scythe* and is available for preorder with an expected shipping date of July this year.

Expeditions takes a journey back into the Scythe Universe, for those not aware, can you remind us where and when that takes place?

Jamey Stegmaier: *Scythe* exists in an alternate universe created by Jakub Rozalski; he calls it the 1920+ world. It focuses primarily on Europa, a Europe-equivalent where mechs exist instead of tanks.

You could have very easily made another expansion or sequel to *Scythe* and taken advantage of the support of the existing fanbase, so what made you decide to do something different with that universe?

JS: Honestly, my sense is that *Scythe* fans would have been perfectly happy with *Scythe 2*, simply set in another part of the world. But I thought they deserved a new adventure, something that feels like *Scythe* and continues *Scythe*'s story, but with all new mechanisms.

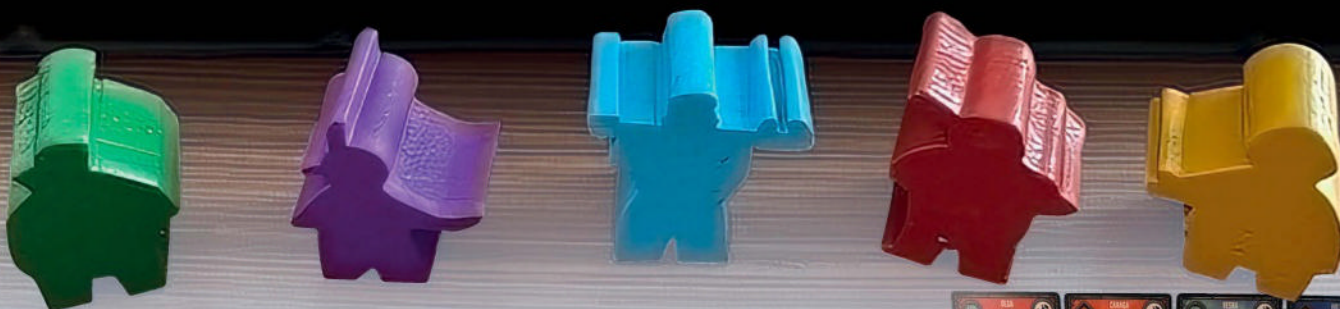
You create a regular series on your blog about your favourite mechanics in games, were there favourite mechanics you tried to include within *Expeditions* and what were they?

JS: During the design process, I made a long list of the things that people (including myself) enjoy about *Scythe*. A few examples are that you can leverage your turn – which is, by design, short and simple – to gain multiple rewards without repeating the same exact turn multiple times and that there is a strong sense of progression starting very early in the game. In *Scythe*, that progression stems

from moving/removing tokens on your player mat – e.g., upgrade cubes that increases an action's benefit and decreases an action's cost – whereas in *Expeditions*, progression stems from the cards you gain that improve your hand, the workers that improve those cards, the locations you discover (essentially new worker-placement spots), and how and when you level up your mech via quests, items, and meteorites. *Expeditions* also has a popularity system that, like *Scythe*, serves as a scoring multiplier.

The cover artwork to the original *Scythe* box by Jakub Róžalski is as famous as the game itself and they've continued to work with you as *Scythe* expanded. What influence did they have on the direction you took with *Expeditions*?

JS: Jakub had a huge influence on *Expeditions*. From early in the process, he had a vision of what the story would be, along with the new region (the Tunguska area of Siberia). He wanted a strong sense of exploration and adventure in a competitive game. We worked closely throughout the process to ensure



the mechanisms that took shape were a fair representation of the theme.

Can you give an overview of how *Expeditions* will play?

JS: In *Expeditions*, each player controls a mech miniature and a small hand of cards that will grow during the game. Your goal is to earn the most glory and wealth while exploring a randomised array of 20 location tiles. On most turns in the game, you'll take two actions: Move your mech, Play a card, or Gather the benefit on your mech's location. The action is primarily focused on your mech as it reveals new locations, gathers benefits to improve your engine, vanquishes corruption from the land, and solves quests.

The board in *Expedition* is based on a hexagonal tiling system as opposed to a fixed board layout. Was there a reason for this?

JS: Definitely, the main reason is the exploration theme of the game. Players are wandering into the unknown, as represented by face-down tiles in the central and northern regions.



The main actions in *Expeditions* are based around choices at the expense of other actions which is very similar to how *Scythe* plays as far as I can tell. What other similar mechanics can *Scythe* players expect in *Expeditions*?

JS: Other than those mentioned previously, there's the central conflict in the game, which – instead of happening between players, like in *Scythe* – is connected to corruption tokens that pile up on newly discovered locations. Vanquishing corruption before other players gives you points at the end of the game, and doing so exposes additional benefits on the locations. Another *Scythe* comparison is triumph vs glory: The end of the game is triggered when a player has placed 4 stars on various categories in *Expeditions* (as opposed to six in *Scythe*). Also, just like in *Scythe*, there are asymmetrical pairings in *Expeditions*, as you pair a random mech with a character/companion card combo.

You're accepting preorders for the game but unlike before, the preorders are open before any reviews have been released. What made you decide to adopt this strategy?

JS: In 2022, we proceeded with a strategy we've used for years – we gathered interest in the *Wingspan* Nesting Box, we made it at our expense, and then we only sold it when it was ready to ship to customers. 10,000 customers were happy about that...and everyone else who had to wait for the second or third printing was far less pleased. *Scythe* isn't quite as big as *Wingspan*, but it isn't far off, so I wanted to give *Scythe* fans the opportunity to ensure that they could get a first-run copy of the game. That's why we opened the preorder early in the production process. While review copies aren't available yet, I still had an early PPC copy of the game to showcase in a series



of videos, and from day one we shared the full multiplayer and solo rulebooks. We still know that many of our customers want to wait for the reviews, so even after we've locked in quantities, we'll still make plenty more for those who want to wait.

***Expeditions* is available in two versions, with the Ironclad offering real metal miniatures to play with, what made you decide to offer the choice?**

JS: Mostly because I think the metal mechs in *Scythe* look and feel amazing, and the mechs in *Expeditions* are 4x the volume of *Scythe*'s mechs, so their metal counterparts feel even more impactful. My sense in this crowdfunding-driven world is that there are many people who like deluxe editions of games from the start, so we thought we would offer the choice. So far, the Ironclad Edition has outsold the standard version 3:1.

You've got a shipping date of July for *Expeditions* so once the Mechs land on people's doorsteps what plans do you have for the second part of 2023?

JS: Our main product in 2023 after *Expeditions* is another major game releasing later this year from a new designer. I'm really excited to talk about it this summer, as it's really something special. We're going to print on it soon. 🎮

Four games like...

CARCASSONNE

We explore the seminal castle building game, and point you to your next gaming crusade

Words by **Christopher John Eggett**



Carcassonne is the castle-building game for many. It's how I ended up in the hobby in the first place. A weekend away working out exactly how scoring for farmers works is really the thing that led me to be writing these words for you to read.

Everyone's deep love of *Carcassonne* comes from its simplicity. Players are asked to draw a single tile from a stack (or a bag in some versions) and then place it appropriately. That means placing it so that roads align, castles touch, and the grass isn't interrupted by a sudden open courtyard of a castle. Once players have done that, they have the option of adding a meeple from their supply to a tile – to the castle if it's empty, on a road if it's unoccupied, or lying in a field, if that also doesn't have someone else lying in it. This field, you might shout at your friend many hillsides away, is not big enough for the both of us.

You score points by closing castles, completing roads, and at the end of the game for the number of castles in 'your field'. And that's it.

But there's more to it. See, the tile placement of castles means that you can 'sneak in' on someone else's castle. Placing an open-faced castle near someone else's gives you the chance to eventually join them up. Now you've got a bigger castle between you and both get the same number of points. Of course, a majority rule works here, so if you somehow sneak two of your meeples in, all of those points – that someone else helped build, are yours.

And with that comes the conflict – the 'okay we'll work together on

this, for now' deals, the 'oh, they've just taken the majority of that castle, so let's make it impossible to finish' spitefulness, the 'don't worry, I won't sneak in' barefaced lies. The fact that this is one of the hobbies most lauded entry points suggest that we're all maybe a little more interested in having a passive-aggressive fight that you might expect.

But, what if you want more? There's plenty of games that can get you a little bit of that *Carcassonne* feeling while diving into the next level of the game. Here's our picks.

RELEASED: 2000

DESIGNER:
Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

PUBLISHER:
Hans im Glück

PLAYERS: 2-5

PLAY TIME: 45m

RRP: £37



STREETS

CONNECTION:
Cities without the sprawl

If *Carcassonne's* approximately 1 million expansions (okay, there's only 11ish depending on how you're counting) is too much, and you dream of a smaller, faster game that is *actually* over in 45 minutes rather than four hours (once you've got the dragon, bazaar, and towers running in a game it can just become unwieldy), then *Streets* is your answer. Creating rows of connected streets gives you that same 'completing a castle' feeling, but with a variety of different scoring mechanisms. You can also add to one another's rows in a similar 'that's very useful for me' kind of way, but it's not the most pronounced version of this. One for those who want a polished game, without the danger of a hours-long construction argument.



GINKGOPOLIS

CONNECTION:
Love to muscle in

This is a shared city building game that creates not only a puzzle of how best to play tiles, but also three delicious mechanics - the pick and pass mechanic, a kind of area control and a little bit of engine building. Each turn players pick a car from their hand to play, and then pass the rest to their neighbour. Players play a tile to edge of the current city, or even on top of other tiles, and also take a power card matching the colour of the one you previously played. This lets you build up an engine that will allow the upgrade of your buildings, or end game points. And those points at the end of the game can come from a number of sources, including the layout of the board itself. Creating large clumps of one colour might make the difference between a win and a loss. Sound familiar? A reasonable set up from *Carcassonne* with plenty to get your teeth into long term.



ALHAMBRA

CONNECTION:
Market manipulate your city

This much loved classic from Queen Games has one of the most important bits of flavour for a *Carcassonne*-like game, and that's walls. Each tile that you buy from the main market (using the four currencies the game offers) has a number of sides blocked off by walls. Each tile you place has to be able to get back to your personal fountain without bumping into a wall. So rather than closing your cities in, you're trying to create a pathway back to the centre. There's also a 'reserve' of tiles that you can add (and swap) tiles to, which, in combination with buying your tiles from the market, means you have a lot more control about the kind of shapes and number of points you're able to create. For those who love the way that *Carcassonne* lets you build, but hate the way you're restricted by the way tiles are drawn, *Alhambra* is a perfect way to take back control.



KINGDOMINO

CONNECTION:
King of your OWN castle

So, you don't like to fight with your loved ones. Maybe you have younger kids who are at that roll-&-write-only stage because the whole 'shared game space' thing simply means sibling warfare. While they might be able to play *Carcassonne* they're also mostly interested in inflicting as much pain on one another as possible, while you're just trying to have a nice time. Enter, Kingdomino. Your own easy-to-build kingdom. Pick and place your dominos around your castle (up to a 5x5 grid) and create properties of different area types. A nice and simple recreation of the build-it vibes of *Carcassonne*, with plenty of depth and half the arguments.



**WHY BUY
ONE GAME?
RENT MANY.**



SPRING ARRIVALS

www.kosmosgames.co.uk

See you at
UK Games Expo
2 - 4 June
NEC Birmingham

01580713000 games@thamesandkosmos.co.uk















KOSMOS



The classic video game series comes alive in this officially licensed board game version!

Based on the award-winning video game, you'll explore Shadowgate, the Living Castle, discovering relics and spells and completing legendary quests. Compete against other players to piece together the fabled Staff of Ages – It is only then will you be able to confront the Warlock Lord, fulfill the prophecy, and be crowned High Lord of the Westland!



2-4 PLAYERS | 60-90 MIN | AGES 14+

**TRICK or TREAT
GAMES**

TRICKORTREATSTUDIOS.COM/GAMES



**STEEL
WARRIORS**

NEW WARGAMES SHOW

**AT MAGNA, SHEFFIELD ON
SATURDAY, 25TH MARCH 2023**

£5 ADMISSION (£3 CONCESSION)

**COMPETITIONS
GAMES
BRING & BUY
HOT FOOD & DRINKS
FREE PARKING**



**STEEL-WARRIORS.CO.UK
INFO@STEEL-WARRIORS.CO.UK**

justgames

**A new and exciting centre for many
different types of gaming in Guernsey.
Come and discover for yourself
what's in store and join in
many events and activities!**

Stockists of Board, Card,
Computer, RPG & Video Games.

Unit 5, The Albany, St. Peter Port,
Guernsey, GY1 1AE

Tel: **01481 712240**

Facebook: **Facebook.com/JustGamesGsy**

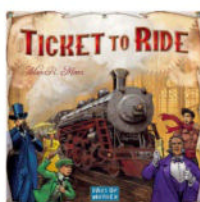
www.justgamesgsy.co.uk

WHO GOES FIRST?

Join us on a tour of some of our favourite ways to start a game

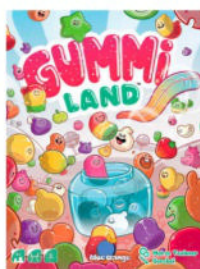
Words by **Christopher John Eggett**

Deciding on the first player is an important part of any game night. Often there's a willing victim ready to hop in and ask the first silly question about what something does on the board, but other times you want something a little bit spicier. This is where the humble 'choosing the first player mechanism' comes in to play. If you're like me you're always a bit disappointed when the rulebook just says 'select a player' or 'roll a dice, the highest rolling player goes first' when it comes to who starts a board game. Why not then, instead, use one of these 20 ways to pick the starting player. And hey, if you're not sure which one to pick, you can always roll a 20 sided dice.



01

The player who is the most experienced traveller goes first
Ticket to Ride



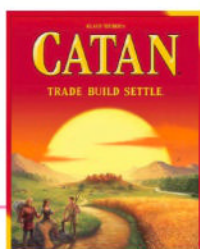
02

The player who likes Candy the most is the first player and becomes the Active Trainer
GummiLand



03

The player who most recently had a "déjà vu" becomes First Player
Anachrony



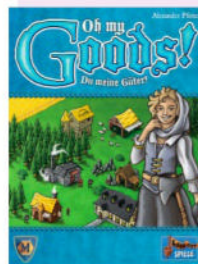
04

The oldest player is the starting player
Catan



05

Give the First Player Card to the player who has lived in the same place the longest
Villagers



06

The players who most recently worked the hardest becomes the first active player
Oh My Goods!



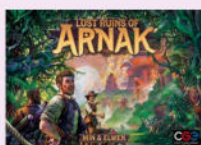
07

The player who last picked a mushroom starts
Kinoko



08

Whoever is reading these rules is the start player
Mists Over Carcassonne



09

The starting player is the one who most recently travelled to a place

they had never visited before

Lost Ruins of Arnak



10

The player to have most recently dreamt of robots is the first player

Mech A Dream



11

The player with the highest city population goes first

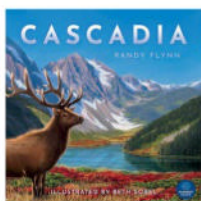
Pandemic



12

The most humble player goes first

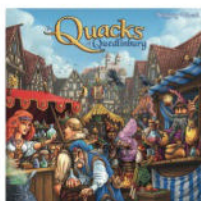
Everdell



13

The player who most recently saw one of the wildlife in the game will be the first player

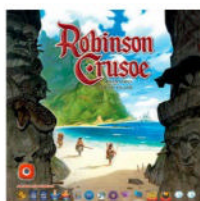
Cascadia



14

The last person to cook something goes first

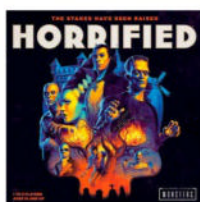
The Quacks of Quedlinburg



15

The youngest player becomes the first player

Robinson Crusoe: Adventures on the Cursed Island



16

The player who most recently ate garlic takes the first turn

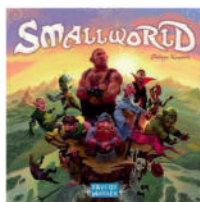
Horrified



17

The player that was last stung by a bee receives the first player token and starts the game

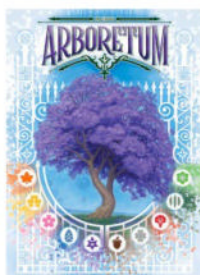
Meadow



18

The player whose ears are the most pointed starts the game

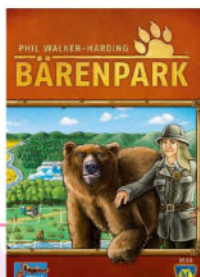
Small World



19

The player who most recently watered a plant is named the start player

Arboretum



20

The starting player is the player who last visited an animal park

Bärenpark





SHOP SPOTLIGHT

COMMON MEEPLE

Jack and Mike from Common Meeple talk about swapping army boots for ladders and shoots

Interview by **Christopher John Eggett**

Tell us a little bit about how the store got started?

After leaving the Army, Jack and I were searching for new careers, we knew we wanted to do something we were passionate about and that would make us excited to go to work in the mornings. We decided to put together three of our shared passions; Board Games, Beer and Coffee! We knew there was a gap in the market in Swansea so we got cracking with our business plan and getting the wheels in motion. Almost 18 months later we managed to open in September 2022.

What's it like being a FLGS in your area?

Sharing our passion with others is great and the gaming community is full of friendly and welcoming people so we get to meet and talk to wonderful people everyday. Whether it's those who have been playing board games for years and know more than we do or its people who haven't touched a board game for 20+ years its always an interesting conversation. We have a lot of students around us so by day you might find a few people working away on dissertations or studying for exams and then in the night they'll be back for a society social playing games and letting their hair down.

What do you think makes your store unique?

There's one word that keeps cropping up in reviews and feedback that we've been getting and that is "atmosphere". Whether it's being described as welcoming, relaxed, chilled or cosy that seems to be the thing that keeps

people coming back. Everyone is welcome (as we're sure is the case in most other board gaming spaces) and we're fortunate to have a huge window by the front door so people get to see the variety of people we have and not have the feeling that it's not the space for them.

What events do you run for the local gaming scene?

Most of our gaming events have followed the ethos of Common Meeple which is all about bringing people together around a shared interest in board games so we hold regular social nights where people can come alone and meet like minded people to play games with. We've ran One Night Werewolf and *Blood on the Clocktower* events, there is a Welsh speaking board game group that meets in the cafe on a Wednesday night where anyone who speaks or is learning Welsh is welcome to join. We've also recently started teaching sessions where we'll pick a board game and have a dedicated member of staff to teach the game and help get people playing over a two hour session. We also have two *D&D* groups with fantastic DMs.

What's been your favourite part of running the store so far?

Easy question, people! Everyone we've met through opening Common Meeple has been lovely. Seeing people come together and have fun in the cafe is what it's all been about. When we get to teach games and the group



have a really fun time is probably the most rewarding thing, but just meeting all these wonderful people has made it all completely worth it!

What are you plans for the future?

We've got space to expand within our building and have a few options on the table; from an escape room in the old bank vault to a tavern themed private TTRPG room we're not quite sure where to start. That's a few months down the line yet and in the mean time we're looking to expand our range of games and events. 🍷

WHERE CAN I FIND IT?

77 St Helen's Rd
Swansea
SA1 4BG
www.commonmeeple.co.uk

INDIE RPG Book Club READY TO LAUNCH

Gather with other players, GMs and readers

Troika!

Sell

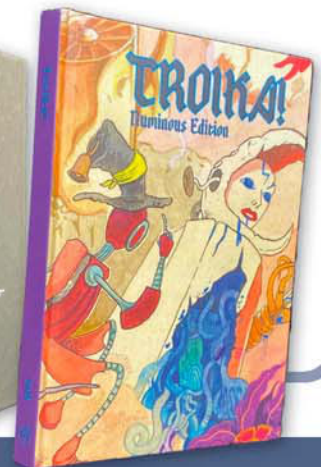
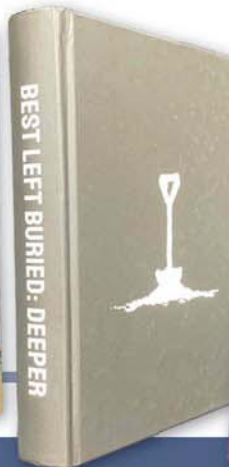


ORBITAL BLUES

BEST LEFT BURIED: DEEPER



Hosted by Chris Bissette, the creator of The Wretched, FEAST, In The Bluelight and Treasures of the Troll King (both for MÖRK BORG), Chris' obsessive knowledge of roleplaying games will lead the discussion on the game each month before we open to wider reactions.



FIND OUT MORE HERE:

www.ttgami.ng/indie-rpg-book-club



tabletop time machine

1633 FOX AND GEESE

Fox and Geese is certainly older than 1633, but that's the earliest reference to it in the Oxford English Dictionary. ('Let him sit in the shop and play at fox and geese with the foreman', in Shackerley Marmion's play *A Fine Companion*.) It is in fact the traditional English representative of a vast family of folk games stretching over most of the world and characterised by H J R Murray as 'hunt games'. Their defining feature is asymmetry. One player tries to save a single prey, or occasionally two, which the other seeks to capture with a multiplicity of predators.

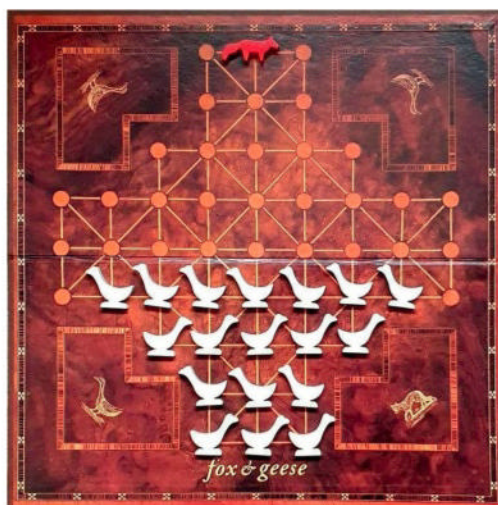
Alternatively, in some versions, a single hunter (the fox) seeks to avoid being trapped by a multiplicity of prey (geese) and presumably pecked to death by the gaggle.

Hunt games are closely related to Alquerque, which I wrote about last time, in that they are characteristically played on the points of a reticular board rather than the cells of an a real one. This practice is typical of ancient south-east Asian games such as Weiqi (Go) and Xiangqi (Chinese Chess). Thus the Chinese and Japanese equivalents of the European asymmetrical Hnefatafl sees a general seeking to capture and escape a band of rebels.

As with all folk games, there are no 'official rules' to hunt games, only typical ones. The pieces' initial positions are variable and they usually all move between two points connected by a line. The horde (geese) aim to trap the singleton fox by surrounding it so that it cannot move, though in some cases the latter can escape by reaching the further end of the board. The fox can capture an unguarded goose by jumping over it to the necessarily vacant space beyond, and, as in Draughts and Alquerque, can make as many captures as possible in a single move.

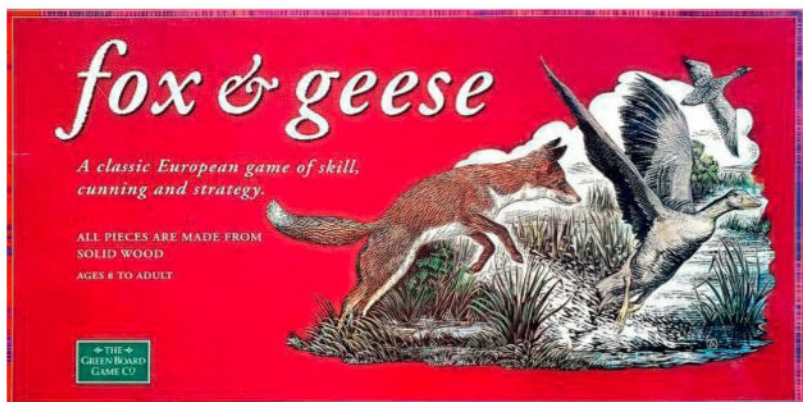
In Asian 'tiger' games there may be from one to four tigers and up to 24 hunters, dogs, or cattle. They are often placed on the board one by one alternately with the singleton, making them games of placement and movement instead of movement alone. The boards often feature a triangular extension, and a few are played on triangular boards alone.

The 13th-century *Libro de Juegos* of Alfonso the Wise



ABOVE Cercar la Liebre illustrated in *El Libro de Juegos*

LEFT AND BELOW Fox & Geese beautifully produced by the Green Board Game Company



includes one of the earliest European hunt games, Cercar la Liebre (Trap the Hare). It looks as if it might have been derived from Alquerque by removing two of one player's 12 pieces and replacing all of the other's with a singleton hare on the centre point. With the rise of Chess, this came to be played on the dark cells of a chequered board, as did Draughts, so, in a sense, Fox & Geese is to Trap the Hare as Draughts is to Alquerque. ♣

David Parlett is a games inventor and historian, author of *The Oxford History of Card Games* and its sequel on board games, and a visiting professor of games design at the University of Suffolk.



HOME OF BATTLEFIELDS



**VARIOUS
SIZES**



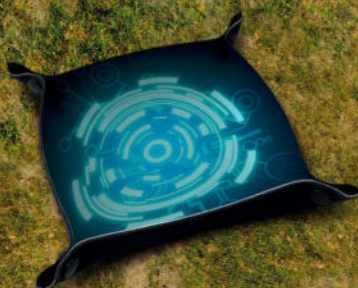
**DIFFERENT
MATERIALS**



**LOTS OF
DESIGNS**



**FRIENDLY
SHIPPING**



DICE TRAYS



PREPAINTED TERRAIN

PRINT-0-MAT - YOUR IMAGE ON MOUSEPAD MAT

WWW.DEEPCUTSTUDIO.COM



INFO@DEEPCUTSTUDIO.COM

ADVENTURE BOOK GAME

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Sauron's shadow has fallen across Middle-earth, and the One Ring must be destroyed. Relive iconic film storylines and moments in The Lord of the Rings Adventure Book Game!

AVAILABLE APRIL | www.ravensburger.co.uk



Play with detailed miniatures



Experience 8 illustrated board game "pages"



Avoid the One Ring's corruption



Age: 10+ | 1-4 Players | 20 min/chapter

© New Line Productions, Inc. All rights reserved. THE LORD OF THE RINGS, THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, THE TWO TOWERS, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, THE RETURN OF THE KING and the names of the characters, items, events and places therein are ® of The Saul Zaentz Company d/b/a Middle-earth Enterprises under license to New Line Productions, Inc. (s23)

Ravensburger